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Theology (Asiatic)

DIRECTORIUM ASCETICUM;

OR,

GUIDE TO THE SPIRITUAL LIFE.

THE

DIRECTORIUM ASCETICUM;

OR,

GUIDE TO THE SPIRITUAL LIFE.

BY

JOHN BAPTIST SCARAMELLI, S.J.

WITH PREFACE

BY

HIS EMINENCE THE MOST REV.

CARDINAL ARCHBISHOP MANNING.

Seventh Edition.

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IN FOUR VOLUMES.

VOL I.

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1917

NOTICE BY THE EDITOR.

JOHN BAPTIST SCARAMELLI was born at Rome in the year 1688. Having entered the Society of Jesus, he was employed for more than thirty years in the apostolic ministry, and was everywhere distinguished for his great zeal, and for the profound knowledge he displayed of the ways of the interior life. He died at Macerata in 1752.

The works of Father Scaramelli on spiritual subjects are widely known, and maintain the reputation which their author enjoyed during his life. In particular, his "Direttorio Ascetico" has been more than once reprinted in Italian within the last few years, and has been translated into French, German, and Spanish. The present is the first English version that has been published of this celebrated work.

The "Guide to the Spiritual Life," as it is called in this edition, although more immediately addressed to Directors of souls, may be used with advantage by all Christians who aspire to perfection. The author himself makes this remark in his Preface or Introduction. It is essentially a practical work, being intended to supply a defect which the author observed in the treatises of previous writers.

These had indeed delivered excellent maxims of perfection, but not in such a form as to be immediately applicable to the wants of individual souls. Father Scaramelli has not failed to set forth the scientific or theological basis of each branch of his subject, following in the main the doctrine of St. Thomas; but he has always kept before his eyes the needs of those priests who desire to have some assistance in directing souls called to something higher than the ordinary Christian life.

One of the objects carefully kept in view in the preparation of this edition, has been to preserve the theological exactness of the author. But fidelity to the original, even in the minuter details, has been studied throughout. Many reasons, it is true, suggested themselves, why numerous, if not important, alterations should be made. Scaramelli's writings partake of the peculiarities—it may not be too bold to say the defects—of the age in which he lived. Some of the stories, told according to the custom of the spiritual writers of his time, in illustration of the principles laid down, are taken from authors whose want of criticism is as undeniable as their piety is beyond dispute. Anecdotes, too, are related with a diffuseness of style popular when Scaramelli lived, and useful enough to fix his teaching in the minds of general readers, but which, owing to the hurry and high pressure of modern life, sometimes severely tries the patience of those who have little leisure. Again, the references given to Fathers of the Church and other writers are often inexact, and works are attributed to persons who are now universally considered not to be their authors. The editions, also, of St. Thomas which the Jesuit Father had at his command, were such only as the poverty

of the house or College of the Society in which he happened to reside could place at his disposal. Hence his quotations from the Angelic Doctor—as he intimates in his Preface—are clumsily given: double references being occasionally made when one would have sufficed.

For these reasons it was at first intended to omit or abbreviate some of the stories, to give some critical remarks in foot-notes concerning spurious quotations, and to cite St. Thomas from the most approved editions. It has, however, on maturer consideration, been thought better and more honest to present Scaramelli's work in the form in which it issued from his hands, so that all who cannot read the Italian original may know it in the English translation, as it is, with all its excellences and all its faults.

PREFACE.

BY THE ARCHBISHOP OF WESTMINSTER (NOW CARDINAL MANNING).

OF all the names which the Son of God assumed with our Manhood, none is more full of love, patience, and tenderness than the name of the "Good Shepherd." It implies more than Kinsman, Brother, or Friend. These express His relations of consanguinity and love to us. But the name of "Shepherd" implies care, oversight, guidance, and protection. And the "Good Shepherd" implies a special and singular generosity and fidelity in this office of divine charity. The Shepherd is the Physician also of His Flock. He provides it not only with pasture, but with healing. Such He intends His Pastors to be to His universal Flock. Our Divine Lord, by the great commission given to St. Peter in the words, *Feed My Sheep—feed My Lambs*, invested him also with the office of the "Good Shepherd." He made St. Peter the Pastor of the World; and intrusted all redeemed souls to his care. This charge gave to the Apostle two divine gifts,—the power of jurisdiction and the grace of the pastoral office; that is to say, the cure of souls and the science for its discharge. From this one

Supreme Fountain the pastoral office and the cure of souls spreads throughout the Church. It is the highest trust ever committed to man. The supreme power of civil government—including the power of life and death—is of an order inferior to the spiritual government of souls and to the power of the Keys. To bear authority over souls; to be guides of the intelligence, directors of the conscience, supporters of the will of men; to have the power of binding and of loosing, and, to that end, of discerning and of judging the state of souls before God; to sit in the tribunal of Penance, and, as in God's stead, to know the inmost heart; all this constitutes a charge which transcends all authority on earth, as the soul in worth transcends the body, as eternity transcends time. Such, then, is the pastoral office. It is laid first and in chief upon the Successor of Peter, and through him upon the Bishops of the Church: by these it is distributed to such as, under them, have the cure of souls; that is, the responsibility to give account of them by number and by name to the Great Shepherd of the Christian Fold. It is of faith that, for the discharge of such an office, a proportionate grace is given, of light, and of charity. Our Lord has provided for the Pastors of the Church a special discernment and direction. Besides the sacramental grace of the Priesthood, which is ever fresh and present in all the duties and trials of the sacerdotal life, there is a *gratia statûs* for those who, together with the Priesthood, are invested with pastoral care. This grace contains a special exercise of the Seven Gifts of the Holy Ghost, by which the intellect and the will are made perfect: for a Pastor has need above all men of holy fear, piety, and fortitude in the will; and for the intelligence, of

the speculative gifts of intellect and wisdom, and of the practical gifts of knowledge and of counsel. It is certain that all grace proportionate to the difficulty and the danger of the office of watching over the souls of men, is given to us by our Divine Master. But this grace demands of us a diligent and conscientious cultivation. We must know the Science of God, His laws and operations in the spiritual life of souls. St. Gregory begins his book on the Pastoral Care by these words :—"No one presumes to teach an art unless he have first learned it by intent application. It is a great temerity, for Pastors who are unskilled, to assume the pastoral office, for the government of souls is the Art of Arts."*

The Physician and the Priest who venture to deal with the diseases of body or soul without adequate knowledge, sin mortally. The words "Medice, cura teipsum" ought to be always in our ears. This may well inspire those who have the care of souls with fear and self-mistrust. How shall they heal the maladies of others, if they do not know how to discern the symptoms of disease, nor what remedies to apply? In the endless variety of spiritual ailments, it needs a practical discernment to distinguish between leprosy and leprosy. But a Pastor has a harder task than this. He must be the guide and counsellor of those whom the Spirit of God is calling to perfection. How shall he fulfil this duty if he be not, both by science and by experience, able to discern the workings and the will of the Spirit of God? For all this, not only study and science but an interior spirit and a practised touch are needed. It is a fearful thought, that *we are to some an odour of life*

* S. Greg., Reg. Pastor. Offic. c. 1.

*unto life, and to others an odour of death unto death;** and for these things who is sufficient? *But sufficiency*, as the Apostle says, *is of God.* He that had *compassion on the multitude because they had nothing to eat*, still stands in the wilderness, breaking, blessing, and multiplying the few loaves which we in our scantiness bring to Him. But He makes them enough and to spare. The bread of life never fails, and in the hands of the simplest Pastor, who seeks it from his Master's hand, all that is needed for the life, health, perfection of His flock, is given abundantly. The "Good Shepherd" gives to His Pastors all that His sheep require. The humblest Pastor, if he keep close to the Great Shepherd of the sheep, shall never fail to give all that his flock can need.

The science by which we are directed in this Art of Arts, has three chief divisions,—Moral, Ascetical, and Mystical. Moral Theology is the exposition of the Divine Law, in its relation to conscience. Ascetical Theology treats of the earlier stages of spiritual life, namely, penance and mortification; and Mystical Theology, of the higher and more perfect, that is, union with God by prayer and contemplation. This threefold division is rough, and not precise; for in some degree all these three parts of Theology apply to all the stages, and are mingled together in direction at every period of the spiritual life. Nevertheless, they have each a special application, and a peculiar ascendency in the three successive states of the soul, which may be described as its purification, illumination, and union with God. Scaramelli's Ascetical and Mystical Directories treat, with great clearness and detail, of the

* 2 Cor. ii. 16.

higher stages of the spiritual life; yet they are of a kind so practical, as to be a benefit to all persons who will diligently study them. They are admirably fitted for Seminaries, and once well mastered, they will supply our pastoral clergy with a copious store of rules, maxims, and counsels, for the instruction and guidance of their flocks.

It only remains to give thanks to those members of St. Beuno's College who have helped to translate the Ascetical Directory, especially to the Rev. Father Eyre, to whose careful editing the present volume owes its completeness and accuracy; and heartily to commend this book to our Seminaries, and to our Clergy at large.

HENRY EDWARD,
Archbishop of Westminster.

October 8, 1869.

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INTRODUCTION.

EVERY one surely would consider that master of a vessel to be out of his mind, who, without oars, without mast, without sails, without anchors, and without provisions, should believe himself able safely to carry passengers and crew across the open sea to the place of their destination; as all are aware that such appointments and supplies are the necessary condition of gaining the harbour of rest, in defiance of contrary winds, and in despite of furious storms. In the same way every one would look upon that general as bereft of reason, who, without arms, without artillery, without the engines and the implements of war, should think to conquer provinces and empires, and to subject them to the rule of his sovereign; as it is obvious to each of us that to be provided with military stores is perfectly essential to the success of such undertakings. Just so it seems to me, we ought to judge that Director to be utterly wanting in sense, who, without knowing, or without employing the proper means, should hope to bring to a successful issue the great enterprise of leading to perfection the souls confided to his care, and should, without such means, presume to guide them through the stormy sea of this life, amidst the tempests of so many passions, the troubled waters of so many temptations, the rocks of so many dangerous occasions, and expect to lead them to the port of Christian perfection, from which a safe passage may be made to the most blessed harbour of eternal happiness. And therefore having, in the work which I now undertake, proposed to myself to give Directors a true idea of Christian perfection, and, at the same time, to suggest to them practical

methods by which they may gradually instil this perfection into the souls intrusted to their keeping, it seems necessary, in the first place (and to this, accordingly, I shall devote the whole of the present treatise), to lay down the means to be employed for the successful attainment of that object. Indeed, to arrive at the desired perfection, without such means, is no less impossible than it would be impracticable for a traveller to reach the end of his journey without first passing along the roads that lead him to it.

2. But as in the first Article of the first Section of this work I am going to treat more diffusely and thoroughly of the entire scope of the work, I trust that the devout reader will allow me just now to detain him for a little space, while I set forth the motives which have induced me to undertake a task so laborious, and so far surpassing my feeble powers. In the course, then, of my holy duties, when engaged in giving missions, in which I have spent a great portion of my life, it has often happened to me to come in contact with pious and docile persons, disposed alike by natural inclination, and by the impulse of grace, to make rapid progress in Christian perfection, had they only been so fortunate as to meet with an experienced Director to be their guide in a journey of so much difficulty and of so much danger. Hence the thought struck me that it would contribute greatly to the glory of God and the good of souls, if a Guide to the Spiritual Life were published, which, leaving unnoticed the extraordinary paths of sublime contemplation along which God occasionally leads some favoured persons, should point out to Directors the method of guiding their penitents along the easy and beaten paths of ordinary grace—by which the greater number of devout souls are wont to travel—ever, however, combining with theory some practical instructions for the safe and profitable rule of conduct of such souls. Because it seemed to me that, if Confessors were provided with full and clear information concerning all the roads by which perfection is reached, they would be able, with great ease, to help forward on their journey persons of whatever character who might present themselves in the sacred tribunal; always supposing such persons to be already set free from the slavery of mortal sin.

3. I was occupied with these reflections, and was already turning

over in my mind the plan of this new edifice—I was already, indeed, collecting materials, and was on the very point of beginning the work of building—when an unforeseen occurrence strongly confirmed me in the resolution I had formed. A Priest charged with the care of souls came to me for advice. He set before me the state of soul of a young girl, a penitent of his, poor in the gifts of fortune as she was rich in innocence and virginal purity, and he begged me to suggest to him the measures to be adopted, in order to bring to perfect fertility a soil which seemed to him so worthy of cultivation. In the course of conversation, he made a remark to me which left a deep impression on my mind. He had, he said, perused various works, all treating of spiritual perfection (and he mentioned one of very high authority); he admired the sublimity and usefulness of their teaching, but he had been quite unable to reduce it to practice: he was at a loss where to begin, how to go on, or how judiciously to apply the rules given to the particular case before him. It seemed to him, in short, that these authors had offered to him the richest materials of embroidery—thread of gold, jewels and gems of great price—but had never taught him the way to work out the beauteous pattern of perfection which he longed to trace in the soul of his youthful penitent. On hearing this, I told him that he was putting to me a question which I could not satisfactorily answer in any other way than by referring him to two works which I was myself preparing to write;* because to ask the method of guiding a soul to perfection was the same thing as to make inquiry how to form an accomplished architect or a first-rate artist: things that require a long course of study and experimental teaching. In conclusion, after I had given him a short instruction as to the best way of beginning his work of grace, I bade him farewell.

4. In this interview I saw in practice, as I had before recognised in theory, how very useful it would have been if I had prepared for use a clear and methodical exposition of the ways of Christian perfection; explaining, in the first place, one after another, its commencement, progress, advanced stages, and final state; continually and systematically joining with speculative teaching

* The author alludes to his *Directorium Ascelicum* and *Directorium Mysticum.*

rules drawn from experience, which, more than anything else, contribute to the safe accomplishment of the soul's journey; so that a Director might see at a glance the path which his penitent has to traverse, and be able to give him opportune warning of the dangers which he may have to encounter. Of all this, as I have said, I was abundantly convinced, and had already made up my mind to frame the whole work upon this idea. But the incident I have just related strengthened me more than ever in my resolution. And with the grace of our Blessed Lord (for from a fountain of evil, such as I know myself full well to be, no real good can spring), I hope that this my undertaking may prove very serviceable to Directors in their sacred ministry, and most profitable to the souls which are guided by their direction.

5. I shall divide the entire work into four Sections, in which I shall comprise the whole extent of Christian perfection, and each Section shall be subdivided into several Articles. In the first chapter of each Article I shall discuss the points of doctrine which are indicated in the title of the Article; and since I address myself to guides in the spiritual life, who should be thoroughly grounded in the science of their profession, I shall establish the truths enunciated, not alone by arguments taken from reason, but likewise by the authority of the Holy Fathers of the Church, and very often by that of the Angelic Doctor, who subjected their teaching to the rigorous analysis of the Schools, especially in his *Summa*, of which I have availed myself a good deal, using such editions as were at hand when I was composing my book.

6. As I wish my work to be useful to such of the laity also as may not understand Latin, I shall always translate the passages quoted from Scripture and the Fathers. The last chapter of each Article I shall reserve for practical advice on the subjects of the preceding chapters, and I hope thus to preserve Directors from all risk of misunderstanding the teaching previously conveyed. In the chapters of instruction I shall direct my discourse to all readers without exception, though such chapters are intended more particularly for the use of Directors. In the chapters of practical advice I shall address myself to Directors exclusively, though all Christians may be able to reap benefit from them.

7. I shall endeavour to vary the instruction with moral stories and examples taken from ecclesiastical history, or from accredited and trustworthy authors; and this for two reasons: in the first place, to make the matter more interesting, or, at all events, less uninviting; in the second place, to render it more profitable to the reader. The saying of St. Gregory has ever been impressed on my mind: that no small portion of mankind are more moved to the desire of heavenly things by example than by argument.* The reason is a simple one: by the way of authority and argument we come to know the truth confusedly, and in the abstract only; but by the light of example we see it clearly and in action: reason and authority prove that virtue ought to be practised; but facts show that it is really practised: and this is why examples have more power than reasons to move our souls. One thing, at least, is certain, that the one and the other combined, are more efficacious than either singly, to excite our will to the performance of good works.

8. And here I foresee that a serious objection relating to myself personally will arise in the mind of the pious reader, which he will probably, out of delicacy, be unwilling to express, but which I ought not to refuse to make public to my own confusion. The difficulty which so much redounds to my shame is this: that no one ought to assume the office of a teacher of the spiritual life, who has not yet taken his place as a learner in the school of the spirit, nor should any one give lessons to others in that perfection which he has himself never carried into practice. This objection, I own, not only comes home to me, but pierces my heart through and through; nor can I give any other answer than that which many times I have given to my guilty conscience, which itself suggested the objection to me, namely, that my trust is in God. I have clear and repeated proof that the Almighty wishes me to compile this work, disproportioned as it is to my poor ability. I must consequently trust in Him, and make an act of faith, that this is one of those occasions in which Almighty God makes use of feeble instruments for the performance of great works, that so His glory may shine forth the more. And hence

* Sunt nonnulli, quos ad amorem patriæ cœlestis plus exempla quam prædicamenta succendunt. Dial. lib. i. cap. 1.

it behoves me now to say of myself in simple truth, what St. Gregory said in his humility, when, as he was about to undertake his explanation of the Book of Job, he felt discouraged at the arduousness of the task: "I am out of heart, seeing my own inability, but am made stronger by my very weakness. I am buoyed up with confidence in that God, Who gives speech to the dumb, Who makes eloquent the tongues of little ones, and has even moved to utterance the tongue of a brute. And why have not I sufficient grounds for hope that God will infuse into my dull mind the gift of understanding, if, when His glory require it, He knows how to put words of truth into the mouth of even irrational creatures? Encouraged by this consideration, I am no longer in alarm concerning the success of my work, much as I stand in dread of myself; and now I boldly put my hand to the work." *

9. No other recompense do I desire to reap from this my labour, save the glory of God and the spiritual advantage of my fellow-men, who may be helped along the path of Christian perfection to their heavenly country; the which if peradventure I am fortunate enough to compass in the case of any one person, I shall be able to say what Lactantius said, when consoling himself during the mental toil of his works. His words are as follows: "I shall believe myself to have spent my life well, since we can have no motive more pure and holy for desiring life than the wish to spend it in the service of our neighbour." †

* Fore quippe idoneum me ad ista desperavi; sed ipsâ meâ desperatione robustior, ad illum spem protinus erexi, per quem aperta est lingua mutorum; qui linguas infantium fecit disertas; qui immensos, brutosque asinæ ruditus per sensatos humani eloquii distinxit modos. Quid igitur mirum, si intellectum stulto homini præbeat, qui veritatem suam, cum voluerit, etiam per ora jumentorum narrat? Hujus ergo robore cogitationis accinctus, ariditatem meam ad indagandum fontem tantæ profunditatis excitavi. In Epist. ad Leand. Episc. In exposit. lib. Job.

† Quod si vita est optanda sapienti, profecto nullam aliam ob causam vivere optaverim, quam ut aliquod officium, quod vitâ dignum sit, et quod utilitatem legentibus, etsi non ad eloquentiam, quia tenuis in nobis facundiæ rivus est, ad vivendum tamen conferat, quod est maxime necessarium. Quo perfecto, satis me vixisse arbitrabor, et officium hominis implesse, si labor meus aliquot homines ab erroribus liberans, ad iter direxerit. Opif. Dei. cap. 20.

GUIDE TO THE SPIRITUAL LIFE.

SECTION I.

MEANS TO ARRIVE AT CHRISTIAN PERFECTION.

ARTICLE I.

Essential Perfection, and Instrumental Perfection. In what they consist. Various degrees of Christian Perfection. Division of the work.

CHAPTER I.

THE ESSENCE OF CHRISTIAN PERFECTION CONSISTS IN CHARITY TOWARDS GOD AND OUR NEIGHBOUR.

10. THERE can be no doubt that in our present life we can never reach absolute perfection; because no sojourner in this vale of tears can possess that perfect stainlessness, which is exempt from every, even the slightest fault. It was an error of the Beguards and Beguines, condemned by the Council of Vienne, to maintain that mortal man can arrive at so great perfection as to become impeccable, and that he can attain to so great an elevation as not to be able to wing his flight to a yet higher region of perfection.* It was a dream of the *Illuminati*, dispelled by the holy tribunal of the

* Quod homo in vitâ præsenti tantum et talem perfectionis gradum potest acquirere, quo reddetur penitus impeccabilis, et amplius in gratiâ proficere non valebit. Conc. Gen. Vienn. In Clement. Error. 1.

M. DENIOL'S LIBRARY,

BAWARDEN.

Inquisition in Spain, that in this life a perfection so sublime may be reached that its limits once attained, it is impossible to retrace the path.* These are the idle conceits of blinded souls. The truth is, that so long as we live in this vale of misery and weeping, the sting of concupiscence cannot be removed, nor are all the restraints of divine grace, how strong and sweet soever they be, sufficient to bind it so that its lusts shall never more wanton, and its wild desires never again rage. Hence it follows, that although with the aid of grace and the use of our own industry we may make opposition in each individual instance, we cannot, nevertheless, in the whole course of life, avoid showing some occasional little condescension to our disordered inclinations, nor help incurring the stain of some slight transgression. This is a truth defined by the Council of Trent, which pronounced anathema against such as should dare to affirm that the just man can avoid all sin, even venial, except by a special privilege from God, which the holy Council recognises in none other save in the Queen of Heaven.† In short, it is not given to any one who lives amid the corruptions of this earth never to contract any stain of sin: this is the boast of Him alone Who has His dwelling above the stars in the heavens. If, then, we cannot say that linen is perfectly white when it is ever so slightly stained, nor crystal perfectly clear if it have within it any speck or flaw to dim its brightness; how can we call any one living on this earth absolutely perfect, even though he may outshine all others with the lustre of his sanctity, so long as he is defiled with those venial faults and imperfections of the soul, which mar its beauty?

11. We may add to this that charity—in which, as we shall presently see, the perfection of every rational creature consists—can indeed attain its highest excellence and power in heaven, but not upon this earth; both because the Orient from on High, seen by us through the veil of certain images, which are incapable of fitly representing it, has not strength enough to light up in our

* Quod possit homo ad eum perfectionis gradum pervenire, ut gratia animæ facultates submergat, nec possit omnino vel progredi, vel regredi. Sattelles, tom. ii. De Trib. Inquis. Regul. 325.

† Possit in totâ vitâ peccata omnia etiam venialia vitare, nisi ex special. Dei privilegio. Sess. vj. can. 23.

souls that fire of Divine life with which it inflames the blessed in heaven, who behold it unclouded and unveiled; and because our materialising occupations hinder us from perpetually contemplating and loving that Sun of heavenly beauty, as the blessed do in heaven: whence it happens that our charity cannot be fully perfect as is theirs. This is the teaching of St. Thomas.* And hence the Apostle of the Gentiles hit, so to say, the exact mark, when, in speaking of perfection in this life, he called it the perfection of a child; and speaking of perfection in the next life, he called it full-grown, manly perfection.† And these words are very properly interpreted by St. Thomas in harmony with the idea I have above expressed. The Apostle, says the Angelic Doctor, compares the perfection of our present life to the age of youth, which is feeble and imperfect; and he likens the perfection of the life of blessedness to the state of manhood, which has already reached its perfection of strength and vigour:—to give us to understand how imperfect is our perfection, which, like a child, is always in a state of growth and advancement; and how complete is the perfection of the blessed, which, like a full-grown man, has already attained its perfect stature.‡ Let us then sum up by understanding clearly what we are to hold. The perfection of us mortal men, compared with the perfection of the immortal spirits now reigning in their heavenly country, is, on many accounts, ever wanting, and must be spoken of as a defective and imperfect perfection. But if we compare it with the state of this our present life, and with the capabilities of our feeble forces, we may and must speak of it as true perfection. Nay, when it increases much and attains, if we may so speak, a greater finish, it may

* Alia est perfectio, quæ attenditur secundum totalitatem absolutam ex parte diligentis, prout scilicet affectus, secundum totum suum posse, semper actualiter tendit in Deum; et talis perfectio non est possibilis in viâ sed erit in patriâ. 2. 2. qu. 84, art. 2.

† Cum venerit quod perfectum est, evacuabitur quod ex parte est. Cum essem parvulus, loquebar ut parvulus, sapiebam ut parvulus: quando autem factus sum vir, evacuavi quæ erant parvuli. 1 Cor. xiii. 10.

‡ Et est attendendum, quod hic Apostolus comparat statum præsentem, puritiæ, propter imperfectionem; statum autem futuræ gloriæ, propter perfectionem, virili ætati. Lect. 3, in verba Apostoli.

be termed great perfection, heroic perfection, sublime perfection. Now, it is of this perfection that we are to treat throughout the present work, and we will begin at once by an inquiry into what constitutes its essence.

12. The Fathers of the Church, speaking of Christian perfection, do not agree in the definition they give of its substance; at least, as far as we can judge, some of them appear to make it consist in one particular virtue, while others, it may be thought, assign an entirely different virtue. St. Thomas, applying his angelic mind to the examination of this point, unhesitatingly decides that the whole essence of Christian perfection consists in the love of God and our neighbour; with this distinction, however, that the love of God must hold the first place, the love of our neighbour the second.* This most authoritative opinion is founded on the words of the Apostle, who encourages us to aim at the acquisition of this divine love, putting before us the grand motive that this is the very pith and quintessence, as it were, of our perfection.† It is based, likewise, upon those other words of St. Paul, that the complete and perfect fulfilment of the Christian law is holy love, which, consequently, is the essential perfection of all who make profession of that law.‡ It is admitted by all, that the end of every law is to promote some special perfection in that community for which it has been enacted. Thus the civil laws have in view the formation of a perfect state; rules of military discipline have for their scope the organisation of a perfect army; the laws or rules of monastic life are framed to establish a religious order which shall be pre-eminently perfect in some particular virtue. So, too, God Almighty, in giving us His law, had for His sole aim to form us into perfect Christians. Thus all our perfection should consist in the perfect fulfilment of God's laws, and, consequently, in charity, which, according to the Apostle, is the fulfilment of all God's laws. *Plenitudo legis est*

* Per se quidem, et essentialiter consistit perfectio christianæ vitæ in caritate; principaliter quidem secundum dilectionem Dei, secundario autem secundum dilectionem proximi. 2. 2. qu. 184, art. 3, in corp.

† Super omnia caritatem habete, quod est vinculum perfectionis. Coloss. iii. 14.

‡ Plenitudo legis est dilectio. Ad Rom. xiii. 10.

directio. Whence St. Gregory was moved to say, with reference to this subject, that all observance of the precepts of God attains solidity and perfection in love alone.* This sound and solid teaching has also the support of the authority of St. Augustine, who, long before the Angel of the Schools, had published it for the instruction of the faithful. "Love that is newly born," he says, "is perfection in its infancy; love that is on the increase is mature perfection; great love is great perfection; perfect love is entire and complete perfection."† Consequently, I infer, if the perfection of a Christian increases in proportion as his charity is greater or less, more or less sublime, we have a proof that no distinction can be made between perfection and charity, but that they are, in their essence, one and the same thing.

13. Reason joins itself with authority, and concurs in urging the belief of this important truth. The perfection of everything created most certainly consists in the attainment of the end peculiar to itself; thus we say that an eye is perfect when it sees objects distinctly, because the end for which the eye was made is to see; we call an ear perfect when it distinguishes voices and words with accuracy, for the ear was made to hear with; we call a light perfect when it shows us everything clearly and well-defined, since the object of the light is to enlighten; we call a fire perfect when it burns most actively, for the end of a fire is to inflame and consume. Thus, too, speaking of the fine arts, we consider a brush perfect, if it is well adapted for painting, and a pen, if well suited for writing; because the end of the former is to paint, of the latter to write. To determine, therefore, in what man's perfection consists, it suffices to know what that thing is which unites us to our last end,—I mean to God, Who alone created us, and Who alone now rules us, and preserves us in life. But there can be no doubt that this thing is charity, since the Beloved Disciple lays it down in such plain terms, "He that abideth in charity abideth in God, and God in him."‡ And again, in his

* Quidquid præcipitur, in solâ caritate solidatur. Hom. 27, in Evang.

† Inchoata caritas, inchoata justitia est; provecta caritas, provecta justitia est; magna caritas, magna justitia est; perfecta caritas, perfecta justitia est. Lib. de Nat. et Grat.

‡ Qui manet in caritate, in Deo manet et Deus in eo. I. Epist. iv. 16

Gospel, the same Apostle repeats the words of Jesus Christ, "If any man love Me, My Father will love him, and We will both come down to him and will dwell in his soul, and make Our fixed and permanent abode with him."* Hence St. Paul infers that charity unites the Spirit of God to the spirit of man with the bond of divine love, and of the two forms one spirit.† No wonder, then, that he calls charity *the bond of perfection*,‡ since charity, which unites us with our last end, alone can make us perfect, and alone can constitute the whole essence of our perfection.

14. Throughout this well-grounded train of reasoning, we have always been following the path traced for us by St. Augustine, in his Commentary upon the Psalms. "Jesus Christ is our end; by Him, then, we are made perfect: for all our perfection is to tend towards Him, not, of course, by a bodily movement, but by affections of the heart, and, therefore, by a close union with Him in the sweet bond of charity."§ In following St. Augustine, we have kept close to our guide, St. Thomas, though he explains in a few words what we have expressed in a great many.‖

15. The thought of this great truth pierced to the quick the soul of that blessed youth, who, coming from a distant country to the city of Paris, there to study the sacred sciences, entered a school of theology over which an eminent professor presided as teacher. Seated on a bench with the other students, he listened attentively to the first lecture, which, happily for him, chanced on that day to be upon the words of St. Matthew, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul.*¶ The lecture ended,

* Si quis diligit me, sermonem meum servabit, et Pater meus diliget eum, et ad eum veniemus, et mansionem apud eum faciemus. Jo. xiv. 23.

† Qui adhæret Deo, unus spiritus est. I. ad Cor. vi. 17.

‡ Caritatem habete, quod est vinculum perfectionis.

§ Finis est Christus. Quare dictus est finis: non quia consumit; sed quia consummat: consumere enim perdere est; consummare perficere. . . . Finis ergo propositi nostri, Christus est: quia quantumlibet conemur, in illo perficimur et ab illo perficimur: et hæc est perfectio nostra ad illum pervenire. Sed cum ad illum pervenis, ultra non quæris; tuus finis est. In Ps. lvi.

‖ Dicendum, quod unumquodque dicitur esse perfectum, in quantum attingit proprium finem, qui est ultima rei perfectio: caritas autem est, quæ unit nos Deo, qui est ultimus finis humanæ mentis. 2. 2. qu. 184, art. 2, in corp.

¶ Diliges Dominum Deum tuum ex toto corde tuo.

the youth rose from his seat, turned his back on the teacher, and hastened towards the door with the determination of leaving the school. The students were astounded at this behaviour, and the master, imagining himself to be insulted by the newly-arrived scholar, was bitterly offended. "How have I displeased you," he asked, "that having but just entered my school, you are about to leave it? Are you tired already of my teaching; do my lessons appear so mean and contemptible in your eyes?" "Far from it, indeed," replied the youth; "it is the sublimity of your doctrine which forces me to leave your school. I have already heard quite enough of what has to be done in order that I may become perfect and a saint. What need have I to listen to more? The time has now come for action and practice." Saying this he went away into the retirement of a religious house, there to acquire that perfection of which he had already learned that it was contained whole and entire in the love of God.*

16. Having established the first point, it will not be difficult to prove the second, that after charity towards God, charity towards our neighbour enters into the essence of Christian perfection. We will again take our argument from St. Thomas, quoted just now. He says that the habit of charity, by which we love God, is not different in kind from the habit of charity by which we love our neighbour.† Nay more, he teaches that even the act of charity by which we love God is not specifically different from the act of charity by which we love our neighbour for the love of God.‡ Indeed, in the act of charity by which we love our neighbour for the love of God, is included a formal act of love towards God. Nor should this appear strange to us, since we are witnesses daily of this very thing, in the merely natural order, and in social life. The mother loves the nurse at whose breast her infant is suckled, and on that account is fond of her, and rewards and shows her respect; but as she loves the nurse for the love of the babe, she loves the babe with the same love, only more intensely than she

* Joan. Junior, Dominic. In Scalâ Cœli.

† Habitus caritatis non solum se extendit ad dilectionem Dei, sed etiam ad dilectionem proximi. 2. 2. qu. 25, art. 1. in corp.

‡ Manifestum est, quod idem specie actus est, quo diligitur Deus, et quo diligitur proximus. Eod. loc.

loves the nurse who has care of the child. The man of learning loves study, and on that account shuts himself up all alone in his room; his brain grows dizzy over his books; his cheeks become pale as he bends over the pages, and by incessant application he destroys sight and life; but as he loves study for the love of knowledge to which he is devoted, his affections must be said to be fixed upon knowledge rather than upon study. The sportsman loves the fatigues, the hardships, the exhaustion of the chase; and hence fearlessly exposes himself to the rays of a scorching sun, to wind, rain, and frost; with fearless step he ranges over mountains and hills, through woods and glens, and precipitous paths; sleep is a stranger to his eyes; no food appeases his hunger, no draught allays his thirst; but because he loves these hardships and fatigues for love of the sport after which he so eagerly pursues, it is a clear proof that he loves the sport more than he loves the sufferings and fatigues to which he exposes himself. Thus in the act by which we love our neighbour for the love of God, we love God Himself more than we love our neighbour. If, then, to love our neighbour for God's sake is to love God Himself, it is clear that perfection, which consists essentially (as we have above shown) in charity towards God, must likewise essentially consist in charity towards our neighbour.

17. St. Ambrose relates the history of a contest of charity between a soldier and a young lady of rank at Antioch, named Theodora. She was discovered to be a Christian, and straightway was hurried by the idolaters, not to a prison or the scaffold to be deprived of life, but to a place of infamy to be despoiled first of her virginity, and afterwards of her faith. A soldier, seeing the dreadful danger to which this innocent dove was being exposed, of falling into the claws of obscene vultures, which would soon be coming to attack her, made haste to visit her before any one else had gained admission to where she had been taken; and the charity which glowed in his heart having made him ingenious in devising his plan, he persuaded her to change clothing with him. "In my dress," he said, "in this uniform, you may pass the guards in safety, without being recognised, and I, in your woman's garb, shall be secure from insult in this den of iniquity." The stratagem

succeeded. Scarcely, however, had the innocent girl escaped, when sentence of death was passed upon her at the tribunal of the tyrant; in punishment of the crime of being a Christian, she was to be conveyed to the place of execution and there beheaded. The officers of justice having arrived, and finding the soldier attired as a woman, supposing him to be the young girl on whom sentence of death had been pronounced, they seized and bound him, and led him through the public streets to the place of execution. He had already mounted the scaffold, already was the executioner with drawn sword standing near, ready to strike the blow which would sever the head from the body, and set free the happy soul from its earthly tabernacle; when suddenly the maiden, impelled by lively feelings of gratitude towards her deliverer, magnanimously sprang upon the scaffold, and cried out with a loud voice, "Stay your hand, executioner, I am Theodora; it is I who ought to suffer death." "No!" exclaimed the soldier, "I am the person doomed to die: the sentence of death has fallen to me." "Not so, executioner," Theodora rejoined; "be not deceived by the borrowed clothes which he is now wearing. I am Theodora, whom the judge has condemned: aim your blows at me. See, my neck is bared, strike at once." They continued a long time this contest of love. "Eventually," writes St. Ambrose, "as both had engaged in the strife, so both came off victorious, and the two combats only multiplied the crowns and palms of triumph, for martyrdom originated with the one and was gloriously consummated by the other."* A modern author, in his comments on this narrative of St. Ambrose, observes, "The two were beheaded in glorious martyrdom, in order that the sword of the tyrant might not separate those whom the love of Christ had united together."† It may seem, perhaps, that he ought rather to have said that the sword divided not those whom brotherly-love and the affection of a sincere charity towards their neighbours had joined in one. But no, he was right in saying that the love

* Duo contenderunt, et ambo vicerunt: nec divisa est corona, sed addita. Ita sancti martyres invicem sibi beneficia conferentes, altera principium martyrio dedit, alter dedit effectum. Lib. ii. de Virg.

† Ambo simul capitis obtruncatione gloriosum martyrium peregerunt, ne eos tyranni gladius separaret quos junxerat amor Christi.

of Christ was the bond of this admirable union; because the love by which we love our neighbour for the sake of God, is, in reality, the love of God Himself; and these two, loving each other with the love of fraternal charity, really loved each other with one and the same love—the love of God. Consequently we must acknowledge that the love of Jesus Christ was the real bond of that so holy a union.

CHAPTER II.

CHRISTIAN PERFECTION IS CONSTITUTED BY THE MORAL VIRTUES AND THE COUNSELS; WHENCE IS DEDUCED THE ORDER AND ARRANGEMENT OF THE WORK.

18. If, then, the essence of Christian perfection consists wholly in the love of God and of our neighbour, what is to be said of the moral virtues, and, in the first place, of the cardinal virtues, the origin and source whence all the other moral virtues spring, and which make the soul of him that possesses them so bright and beautiful? What is to be said of the Evangelical Counsels, which our dear Redeemer recommends so strongly in the Gospel? As for example: to renounce all worldly possessions; to lead a life of celibacy; to subject ourselves voluntarily to the will of another; to confer a kindness on a friend when the rules of charity do not make it of obligation; to pray frequently, even when present necessities do not force us to pray; to bestow alms, not only out of our abundance, but also out of that which is suitable for our maintenance; to fast often, even when no precept of the Church enjoins us the practice; to mortify our senses, even in regard to lawful objects; to chastise our body in various ways; and a thousand other things, which, though not under rigorous precept, are nevertheless demanded from us by God, being by their own nature better than their opposites, and very pleasing to Him.

Must not all these holy counsels and exalted virtues have their share in carrying out the noble work of our perfection?

19. Beyond all doubt these virtues concur powerfully in the formation of perfection, not because they constitute its substance, but, as the Angelic Doctor teaches, because they are the instruments by which perfection is elaborated.* St. Thomas, moreover, will have it† that in the words of Christ, "*If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell all that thou hast, and give it to the poor, and follow Me*, the essence of Christian perfection is declared to be found in the mere following of Christ, whereby we become united to Him through charity;‡ and he supports his opinion by the authority of St. Jerome and St. Ambrose, both of whom give this very interpretation of the words, *Follow Me.* The renouncement of riches is mentioned only as an instrument of perfection; as a means, that is, for the acquirement of essential perfection, which consists in following Christ, and in holy love for Him. Cassian teaches the same, in clear and unmistakable terms, in the Conference of the Abbot Moses. To deprive one's self of property and divest one's self of all worldly goods, is not the pith and marrow of Christian perfection, but only a means for its attainment.§ If a painter were to prepare brushes suitable for painting, and procure brilliant colours, combining them skilfully and mixing them with a master-hand, still no one could call him an accomplished artist, because these things are not that at which his profession aims, but only means thereto. The end proposed in the art of painting is to produce representations true to life: other things are but the means which the artist makes use of for this purpose. So in the case before us. The end of the Christian life and therefore its formal perfection, is charity, as we have already shown. To

* Secundario autem, et instrumentaliter perfectio consistit in consiliis. 2. 2. qu. 184, art. 3, in corp.

† Eod. art. in resp. ad 1.

‡ Et ideo ex ipso modo loquendi apparet, quod consilia sunt quædam instrumenta perveniendi ad perfectionem, dum dicitur: Si vis perfectus esse, vade, et vende omnia quæ habes, et da pauperibus: et veni, sequere me. Matth. xix. 21.

§ Nuditas, privatio omnium facultatum, non perfectio, sed perfectionis instrumenta sunt: quia non in illis consistit disciplinæ illius finis, sed per illa pervenitur ad finem. Collat. 1, cap. 7.

renounce all worldly possessions, to lead a life of virginity, to subject one's self to the will of another, constitute Christian perfection, and this too in an exalted degree ; but only as instruments, which help to acquire divine charity, as any one may clearly see, if he take the trouble to consider these things one by one. For voluntary poverty leads us to perfection, not precisely because it deprives us of the fleeting and perishable goods of this world, otherwise, as St. Jerome observes, the philosopher Crates would have been perfect, and many others who have despised these things ;* but because poverty, in depriving us of riches, at the same time plucks from our heart all that attachment to them which is so great a hindrance to the acquisition of holy love. Chastity, too, is perfection, but not precisely because it cuts off even such pleasures of sense as are lawful : else should we have to admit that those idolaters were perfect, of whom history tells us that they lived in entire estrangement to such enjoyments ; but because, in depriving us of vile bodily pleasures, it disposes us to the pure affection of superhuman charity. Obedience also is a great perfection in the faithful, yet not precisely because it divests us of our self-will (for in that case soldiers and slaves would be perfect, since they submit their will to their officers and masters, and sometimes do so in matters that are hard and painful), but because, by crushing the natural propensity of each of us to follow the lead of his own will, we are made prompt to submit ourselves to the Will of God alone, and this submission is the quintessence of the love of God.

20. And the Holy Fathers speak of these moral virtues in the same strain. St. Thomas, treating of these virtues, remarks, "A thing may be called perfect in two different senses : first, as regards what is of the very essence of its being ; which is the case when the thing wants none of those parts without which it could not exist ; in this sense a man is perfect when he has a body, a soul, and that union of the two by which both are made one. Secondly, we may call a thing perfect as to what belongs to the qualities only of its being, which consist n certain things foreign to its essence, but which serve either to prepare or to embellish it ; in this sense

* Hoc enim et Crates fecit philosophus, et multi alii divitias contempserunt. In Matth. iii. 19.

a man is perfect whose limbs are cast in such or such a mould, who has a certain complexion, and particular constitution." From which St. Thomas wisely infers, that the substantial perfection of Christian life consists in that charity which unites us to God, our last and most blessed end; while, without this, all perfection languishes and dies. The moral virtues, on the other hand, contain nothing beyond the accidental perfection of the Christian life, inasmuch as they dispose a man to the attainment and increase of charity, and are, so to say, its jewels.* St. Jerome teaches the same doctrine in many places, when speaking of the mortification of the body by fasting, which is a real, though not more than a moral, virtue. For, writing to Celantia, he tells her, "Be on your guard when you begin to mortify your body by abstinence and fasting, lest you imagine yourself to be perfect and a saint, for perfection does not consist in this virtue; it is only a help, a disposition, a means—suitable, certainly—for the attainment of true perfection."† And the same may be said of all the other moral virtues, for the same reason holds good in all. St. Jerome gives the like instruction to Demetrias: "Fasting is not perfect virtue; that is, it is not a virtue which renders us perfect, but it constitutes the foundation of virtue; it is a ladder by which we ascend to the summit of that Christian perfection which dwells in charity alone. Fasting by itself can never win for a virgin her crown of perfection and of sanctity."‡ St. Jerome, then, agrees in

* Dicendum, quod dupliciter potest dici aliquis perfectus. Uno modo simpliciter, quæ quidem perfectio attenditur secundum id quod pertinet ad ipsam rei naturam: puta si dicatur animal perfectum, cum nihil ei deficit de dispositione membrorum, et aliis hujusmodi quæ requiruntur ad vitam animalis. Alio modo dicitur aliquid perfectum secundum quid; quæ quidem perfectio attenditur secundum aliquid exterius adjacens, puta in albedine, vel in aliquo hujusmodi. Vita autem christiana specialiter in charitate consistit, per quam anima Deo conjungitur. Unde dicitur, (Joan. cap. 1:) Qui non diligit, manet in morte: et ideo secundum caritatem attenditur simpliciter perfectio christianæ vitæ, sed secundum alias virtutes secundum quid. 2. 2. qu. 184, art. 1 ad 2.

† Cave, ne si jejunare cœperis, putes te esse sanctam. Hæc enim virtus adjumentum est, non perfectio sanctitatis. Epist. ad Celant.

‡ Jejunium non perfecta virtus, sed ceterarum virtutum fundamentum est. Gradus præbet ad summa scandentibus; non tamen si solum fuerit, virginem poterit coronare. Idem, Epist. ad Demetr.

recognising no other perfection in the moral virtues, except that accidental perfection which they contribute, as being helps and instruments to the attainment of the essential perfection of charity.

21. I am going to confirm this truth by a well-known incident related in ecclesiastical history.* In the city of Antioch there lived an exemplary priest named Sapricius, who from his earliest years had contracted so close a friendship with a certain layman, by name Nicephorus, that it seemed as though it never could change. However, Sapricius, taking offence at something or other, I know not what, not only broke the bond of a friendship of so long standing, but changed his affection into a hatred so implacable that he would never see him, and studiously avoided every occasion of meeting. Again and again Nicephorus humbled himself before him, and both by the mediation of others and in his own person implored forgiveness for his fault; but all had no effect whatever in softening the heart of Sapricius, or in moving him to show the least sign of peace and reconciliation. Yet the conscience of the priest was no way troubled at all this serious breach of charity, and as usual he ceased not by word and example to animate the people to constancy in their holy faith, amidst the storms of persecution which then were raging against the Christians in the city of Antioch. So much so indeed, that, summoned before the tribunal of the judge to render an account of his religion, and being questioned as to his name and profession, he replied with a holy daring: "I am a follower and priest o Jesus Christ. I observe His law, and try to secure its observance by the people. I honour Him, and seek to forward His worship in every way." The tyrant, on hearing words which sounded to him as bold beyond enduring, burned with fury, and instantly commanded that the resolution of the priest should be tested by frightful tortures. Sapricius remained, however, unshaken, though cruelly scourged and bathed in his blood. Nay, in the midst of his sufferings he even mocked at the tyrant, who was exercising with such cruelty his barbarous power over the body, but had no power to touch the soul, which more than ever, under torture,

* In Vitâ S. Niceph. apud Surium, 9 Feb. et apud Lippo, et Metaphr.

kept true to God. At length the judge, overcome by his constancy, abandoned the design of prolonging his torments, and condemned him to be beheaded on the public scaffold, as a terror to Christians. Sapricius had already left the prison all radiant with joy, more like a conqueror than a criminal, and was on the point of entering the public square, which was to be the glorious scene of his combat and of his victory, when Nicephorus, informed of his condemnation, ran in haste, broke through the crowd of people assembled to witness the sad spectacle, threw himself again and again at his feet, and with tears in his eyes repeatedly begged pardon for his fault, for the love of that God for Whom Sapricius was about to sacrifice his life. Who could have believed it? So many humiliations, so many prayers, and so many tears, were unavailing to soften that stony heart; for the unhappy man, turning away his face, as though in disgust, not only refused to speak a single word, but would not even condescend to bestow one kind look. Soon the executioner unsheathed his sword, ready by a single stroke to crown him martyr of Jesus Christ. But he merited not the martyr's crown, nay, he was incapable of receiving it, for he had not charity; and, I will say with St. Jerome, all the other virtues which he possessed could never crown the martyr. Even had he poured forth his blood under the stroke of the sword, that blood, I will add with St. Cyprian, would not have washed away the stain of his sin against charity.* At the flashing of the steel which glittered before his eyes, Sapricius grew pale, trembled, and exclaimed in a loud voice, "Stop thy hand, executioner; tell me why thou art about to take away my life." "Because," was the answer, "thou adorest Jesus Christ, and despisest the gods and the commands of Cæsar." "If there is no other cause for which I must die," replied Sapricius, "I renounce Jesus Christ, and I am ready to offer incense to the image of Jupiter." These impious words drew tears of grief from the eyes of all the faithful, and enkindled in the heart of Nicephorus a burning zeal for that holy faith which he saw thus publicly outraged by

* Quam sibi pacem promittunt inimici fratrum. Tales etsi occisi in confessione nominis fuerint, macula ista nec sanguine abluitur. Inexpiabilis et gravis culpa discordiæ nec passione purgatur. In lib. De Simpl. Prælat.

the renegade, and leaping on the scaffold, he cried out, "I adore that Christ Whom this wretch denies; I trample on the Jupiter whom he wickedly adores; mine be that death which this coward dreads, mine be the palm which this miserable man refuses." On hearing these words the executioner aimed at Nicephorus the stroke which he had held suspended over the neck of Sapricius, and bestowed upon him the crown that this unhappy man had forfeited by his obstinate spirit of rancour. Now let us reflect that Sapricius was not wanting in moral virtues, for he was a priest of exemplary life. What generosity did he not evince in making open profession of his faith in presence of the judge! What fortitude in enduring cruel tortures! What constancy in reproaching the tyrant even in the midst of torments! And yet all availed him nothing, for he was devoid of charity. Hence the essence of perfection cannot consist in the moral virtues, since these alone, unaccompanied by charity, are insufficient to lead to perfection, nay, even to salvation, one who possesses them. No further perfection then can be ascribed to them than that they form part of the instrumental perfection of which we have been treating. Let us, before leaving the incident which we have been considering, reflect further, with Baronius, that a Christian labours in vain to accomplish great things if he be wanting in fraternal charity, since for want of this admirable virtue, neither wounds received, nor blood poured forth, nor torments bravely endured, were of any avail to this Sapricius.*

22. I trust, however, that the reader will not draw from the solid doctrine which I have laid down an unwarranted inference, capable of being a serious hindrance to that progress in the spiritual life which he desires to make. I would not be thought to mean that because the counsels and moral virtues are merely aids to perfection, and do not constitute its essence, we must set but little store upon these counsels and virtues, and take but little

* Perspicuum tunc plane, sed pavendum editum est exemplum, quo fideles omnes admonerentur, frustra quæque magna conari hominem christianum, nisi fraternæ caritatis compage fuerit solidatus: cum Sapricius presbyter, vitâ jam oppignoratâ martyrio, quod odio flagraret in Nicephorum, ipsum prope ictum vibrante carnifice, Christum negans, idolis sacrificavit. Annal. t. iii. Ad an. 260, num. 52.

pains to practise them. This would be completely to misapprehend my meaning. When I assert that the counsels and virtues are only helps to attain perfection, I wish it to be understood that they are so necessary for the acquirement of that substantial perfection to which the Christian should aspire, that without their assistance it is impossible that it should ever be attained. What would you say of a student eager to perfect himself in the knowledge of philosophy, mathematics, or any other branch of science, who should tear up his books, burn pens and paper, and entirely neglect all application, under the foolish pretence that the knowledge he pants after does not consist in books, pens, paper, and study? Foolish man, you would say, most true is it that mathematics and philosophy do not consist in these things, but rather in a deep understanding and thorough possession of the principles proper to these sciences; still these things are the instruments and the means necessary for acquiring the knowledge you covet, and, consequently, without them you can never attain it. The same may be said on the point in question. The evangelical counsels, works of supererogation, the moral virtues, are means without which, as a common rule, perfect charity cannot possibly be acquired; for although Almighty God by His absolute power could infuse perfect charity without these previous dispositions, yet He is not wont to work such miracles. We must then apply to the practice of these works and virtues with the same zeal which we use for our advancement in perfection. But because this is a question of great importance, and one too upon which the whole plan of this work depends, it will be well for me to explain how a person by means of the moral virtues and the evangelical counsels can attain to perfect charity in which, as we have so often observed, the very essence of his perfection must consist.

23. In all handicrafts perfection is given by one or other of two ways to the articles manufactured; either by adding something to, or taking something away from, the raw material. Thus an embroiderer, by weaving gold thread and silk into the cloth, produces a piece of tapestry. The artist, by laying colours upon his canvas, completes his painting; contrariwise, the carver, by re-

moving small portions of wood from the rough trunk of a tree, and the sculptor by cutting from the hard block some portions of stone, give perfection to their statues. The Christian, however, ought not to be satisfied with either one or the other of these methods singly, but should put them both in practice to finish the work of perfecting his soul, and moulding it into a graceful figure worthy of a place of honour in the heavenly court. He must, in the first place, remove whatever may be an impediment to the infusion of perfect love. I mean, he must cut away all attachments, curb disorderly affections, pluck out evil inclinations,—all which are so many obstacles in the way of perfect charity; hindering, first, its entrance into the soul, and then its taking full and perfect possession. Now, this we bring about by means of the moral virtues and counsels. By voluntary poverty all attachment to worldly possessions is plucked away from the heart; by chastity the lust of pleasure is conquered; and by obedience we root out all adhesion to our own will. Hence, St. Paul, speaking of the life of celibacy, says that he commands it not, but only counsels it, forasmuch as it sets us free from hindrances to the service of God.* It is by means of the moral virtues, moreover, that we bridle those disorderly passions which are the sworn enemies of holy love; now moderating our anger, now our pride, at one time our sloth, at another gluttony, or again some other unruly appetite which is predominant in us. But when one who is aiming at perfection sees that these obstacles are, if not wholly at least in great part, removed, he must then take pains to introduce the positive dispositions into the soul, so that these may prepare the way to a more perfect love, and make its entrance more easy. This is accomplished by means of these very virtues and counsels, because they operate more easily when the vices opposed to them are overcome; they root themselves more deeply in the soul, take full possession of it, and establish in it a certain agreement between the inferior and superior appetites, which are by their very nature at variance; they beget a certain peace, quiet, repose, and purity, the immediate

* Quod facultatem præbeat sine impedimento Dominum obsecrandi. 1 Cor. vii. 35.

dispositions for receiving from God those lights and interior movements of grace which enkindle the flame of divine love in the heart, and at times cause its fire even to consume the whole soul.

24. We may observe that nature itself makes use of these very means in the formation of natural substances. For example, if fire is going to produce in a piece of wood another fire like to itself, it begins by driving away all obstacles to its action. If the fuel is cold, the flame of the fire warms it; if hard, the activity of the fire softens it; if wet, the heat causes the moisture gradually to disperse in thin wreaths of vapour; and when the impediments are in great measure removed, the flame introduces an extreme dryness and a fervid heat, which are the positive and immediate dispositions for burning, followed by the flames themselves, which burst forth from the fuel and change it into a blazing fire. It seems then that nature itself would teach us what we must do to kindle in our hearts the fire of heavenly love. We must first remove from the soul, by the practice of contrary virtues, the impediments of undue attachments and raging passions; afterwards introducing into it, by means of more solid virtues, the calm, the serenity, and the purity which are the immediate dispositions for lighting up in it the purest and most glowing flames of charity. This teaching is wholly taken from Cassian, in the above-cited Conference. All our good and virtuous actions, he says, ought to be directed to purifying the heart from hurtful passions, and preserving it in peace; for by these steps we climb to perfection, which dwells substantially in perfect charity alone.*

25. In order to obtain a more adequate and complete idea of Christian perfection, we must, with the Angelic Doctor, make another distinction of very great importance to the right understanding of the matter in hand. The Saint teaches that the essential perfection of charity is not so wholly indivisible as to have no parts. It may, and even must, be divided into three degrees, of which one occupies the lowest, another the highest,

* Omnia igitur hujus gratiâ gerenda, appetendaque sunt nobis. Pro hâc sollicitudo sectanda est, pro hâc jejunia, vigilias, labores, corporis nuditatem, lectionem ceterasque, virtutes debere nos suscipere noverimus: ut scilicet per illas ab universis passionibus nostris illæsum parare cor nostrum, et conservare possimus, et ad perfectionem caritatis his gradibus innitendo, conscendere.

and the third an intermediate place. The lowest degree of charity consists in loving nothing more than God, or in opposition to God, or equally with God; for to place Almighty God on the level of, or below any created thing, is to do Him a great injury, and to commit a sin so grievous that it is wholly destructive of charity. Though this degree, as the holy Doctor assures us, really deserves the name of charity, yet it does not form the subject of our present work, since this degree is to be found even in abandoned women and in highway robbers, from the moment that by a true conversion they regain the grace of God. The highest degree of perfect charity consists in the unceasing and actual exercise of love, whereby the flame of charity is ever blazing brightly in the heart of him that possesses it. We cannot have this degree of perfection in our present life of misery, but it will be ours in the life to come; for at present, on account of our daily employments, we cannot, like the sunflower, keep our gaze ever fixed on the Sun of the Divinity. The intermediate degree consists in this, that when all obstacles have been removed, and the necessary dispositions are acquired, the soul is able with ease and fervour to perform those acts of divine charity which are the perfection proper to our life on earth, and to which we should aspire. Such will be the subject of the present two books.* To understand the full meaning of this passage it is necessary to read the whole of the Article quoted and that which precedes it, the principles of which are here pre-supposed; but the words we have cited suffice to show that the holy Doctor distinguishes the three grades which we have mentioned, in the substantial perfection of charity, and this is all that is to our present purpose.

26. Hence I infer with Suarez, that absolutely speaking the perfection of Christian life,—including both what is essential to it, and what is merely instrumental and expressive of the practical

* Est autem infimus divinæ dilectionis gradus, ut nihil supra eum, aut contra eum, aut æqualiter ei diligatur: a quo gradu perfectionis qui deficit, nullo modo implet præceptum. Est alius gradus perfectæ dilectionis, qui non potest impleri in viâ, ut dictum est: a quo qui deficit manifestum est, quod non est transgressor præcepti; et similiter non est transgressor præcepti qui non attingit medios perfectionis gradus, dummodo attingat ad infimum. 2. 2. qu. 184, art. 3, ad 2.

mode of carrying it out into action,—consists in the formation of the habit of charity, and in rendering it easy, ready, and prompt in the exercise of full and fervent acts of love towards God and our neighbour. By saying *ease and readiness in the performance of these acts*, instrumental perfection is expressed; for such promptitude is not acquired without removing impediments and introducing the immediate dispositions by means of the moral virtues and the counsels. Again, *the habit of charity when rendered inclined, and even disposed, for its acts*, expresses the formal essence of perfection.* If what we have said be well weighed, all perfection will thus be reduced to the one great means of charity; as the Angelic Doctor tells us in the passage which we have just quoted.

27. All this, however, is not sufficient for carrying out that work of perfection which we are endeavouring to sketch. We must, in addition, make use of all the means necessary to bring it to a proper end. To remove the many hindrances in the way of attaining holy and pure love; to implant in ourselves the positive dispositions which prepare an entrance for it; to practise so many moral virtues and so many counsels by which both these objects are procured; nay, to bring perfect charity into daily action,—are, all things hard difficult and painful, and cannot be achieved except by the manifold aids of meditation, prayer, the sacraments, examinations of conscience, devotions and the like. As I observed at the very outset, it is impossible to attain any end without the employment of fitting means, as it would be to reach our destination without passing along the road. And if this be true even with regard to objects which are in themselves trivial and present little difficulty, how much more true must it be with reference to an end so exalted and of such importance as Christian perfection,—an end which brings with it so many matters of a

* Perfectio spiritualis vitæ christianæ requirit puritatem et habilitatem quandam in ipsâmet caritate ad prompte operandum in totâ suâ materiâ, sive eliciendo, sive imperando; et ad cavendum non tantum omnia contraria, sed etiam defectus, qui fervorem ejus impedire possunt. Hic autem caritatis gradus sine adminiculo, et consortio aliarum perfectionum, quales sunt moderatio passionum, abnegatio rerum temporalium, et similes, haberi non potest. Ergo hæc omnia necessaria sunt ad perfectionem simpliciter vitæ Christianæ. De Relig., tom. 3, lib. 1, c. 4.

hard and painful nature? Hence we conclude that in order to acquire this habit of charity, which enables us easily, quickly, and willingly to elicit full and fervent acts of this virtue towards God and our neighbour, (in which, as we have often repeated, consists all that is essential to perfection,) it is absolutely necessary to use the fitting means.

28. This solid teaching being pre-supposed, the plan of the work comes of itself, and follows naturally. It is divided into four Sections. In the first, we shall treat of the means which must be taken in order to acquire perfection; in the second, of the obstacles to be removed; in the third, of the positive and suitable dispositions which must be obtained; in the fourth, of charity, in which the lustre of perfection shines with pre-eminent brightness as in its essence. The means, of which we are going to speak in the first Section, will serve both to remove the impediments and to introduce the becoming dispositions, as well as to facilitate the practice of divine love with great and ever-increasing fervour. The impediments, of which we shall make mention in the second Section, will be seen to be all those things which are opposed to charity, and wage war against it. The dispositions, which will form the subject of the third Section, are the counsels and moral virtues, but considered as having been already refined by the victory which has in a great degree, if not completely, extirpated their contrary vices. The charity, which we shall dwell upon in the fourth Section, will include both love of God and love of our neighbour, according to their different degrees of perfection. But because charity is attended by faith and hope, which are theological virtues, and themselves also tend directly and immediately to God, we must speak of these likewise in the same Section. Thus Directors will have the whole course of Christian perfection here set forth in a methodical manner. They will find mapped out the roads upon which they are to conduct their penitents; and from the remarks of a practical character, which I shall make a point of frequently suggesting, they will learn what are the errors and perils to be avoided in their direction of souls. I hope that thus their efforts may be crowned with success, and that they may lead many souls to God, and to the haven of eternal rest.

CHAPTER III.

THE PERFECTION OF CHRISTIAN LIFE WHICH HAS BEEN DESCRIBED IS DIVIDED INTO THREE GRADES—THESE FORM THREE STATES OF PERFECTION. FULLER LIGHT IS THROWN UPON THE DOCTRINE AND DIVISION GIVEN IN THE PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

29. BEFORE commencing the present Chapter, it will be necessary to make a most important remark, which the Director must bear constantly in mind throughout the present work. We shall have, in the following Sections, to discourse separately, first, on the means of perfection, then on its impediments, afterwards on its immediate dispositions, and finally on charity, in which it is chiefly seen in all its brightness. Yet we are not to look to these different points in succession only, as they have been treated, but the spiritual man should exercise them all together and in combination; for while he uses the means to raise himself to perfection, such as prayer, meditation, the sacraments, and other such helps, he is, at the same time, engaged in gradually rooting up the disorderly passions, which are impediments; he is acquiring the virtues which are the immediate dispositions; and he is exercising charity both in affection and in act, which is the end proposed in all his endeavours and labours, and by which his soul finally attains perfection. The more vigorously the means are used, the more thoroughly the obstacles are removed; the more fully the dispositions are obtained, the greater will be the warmth of the fire of divine love in our hearts. For in rearing the spiritual edifice, that does not happen which takes place when an earthly palace is to be built. While the workmen are laying the foundations, the roof is not begun; and so long as the first storey is in progress, the second remains untouched. Here, on the contrary, at the very time that we are digging the foundation by removing impediments from the bottom of the soul, the roof of divine charity is already commenced: when we are still engaged in laying the first stones of holy dispositions, some degree of perfection begins to be visible in every part of the whole spiritual edifice. In spite of this, the

proper arrangement of our subject demands that each of the aforesaid matters be treated separately, so that the labour required in setting up the edifice of Christian perfection may be more easily understood and more readily watched.

30. In Christian perfection, then—whether essential or instrumental, as we have explained—the Holy Fathers distinguish three degrees, which degrees place the persons that profess it in one or other of three very different states. St. Thomas attributes to charity three stages of growth. The first he calls incipient charity, the second growing charity, and the third perfect :* whence it follows that the persons in whom charity resides are divided into the three classes of those who are beginners, of those who are advancing, and of those who are perfect. He founds his teaching on the words of St. Augustine, who, speaking of charity, says, "Charity is born expressly to attain perfection. After birth it is nourished; when nourished, it is strengthened; strengthened, it is made perfect."† The charity, which having been born is receiving nourishment, forms the state of beginners; the charity, which having been nourished is growing strong, is the state of those who are progressing; the charity, which having been strengthened becomes perfect, constitutes the state of those who are already perfect. What is here said of charity applies equally to all other virtues; for each one has its own beginnings, its own increase, and a perfection proper to itself. And therefore each virtue may form the three classes spoken of. St. Gregory affirms the same. Every virtue, he says, comprises certain degrees; for its commencement is one thing, its advancement is another, and its perfection is something different from both the preceding.‡ He repeats the same remark in another place.§ Indeed, the Angelic Doctor, after applying the distinction of grades and states just mentioned to the theological virtue of charity alone, elsewhere extends it to the whole of the spiritual

* 2. 2. qu. 24, art. 9, in corp.

† Ut perficiatur nascitur, cum fuerit nata nutritur, cum fuerit nutrita roboratur, cum fuerit roborata perficitur. Tr. 5, in 1 Epist. Joan.

‡ Unaquæque virtus quibusdam gradibus augetur. Aliud namque sunt virtutis exordia, aliud perfectio. Hom. 15, in Ezech.

§ Tres modi sunt conversorum, inchoatio, medietas, et perfectio. Moral. Lib. xxiv. c. 7.

life, and to every faculty of man's soul. In every power of man there is, he says, a beginning, a middle, and an end. Hence there is every reason why these three stages must be found in the spiritual life: a beginning, to which belongs the state of beginners; an intermediate state, which is that of those making an advance; and an end, which corresponds to the state of the perfect.* St. Bernard,† Hugo of St. Victor,‡ and Richard of St. Victor,§ and in general all the Doctors of the Church, teach the same thing.

31. But before entering upon the explanation of the difference which exists between these three states, we must pre-suppose that the life of aspiration after perfection leads us to our heavenly country by three roads, of which the first is called the negative way, the second the illuminative, and the third the unitive: a very just and appropriate distinction, allowed by all the masters of the spiritual life, and not to be rejected without sinful daring, since Innocent XI. condemned Michael Molinos for daring to cast ridicule upon it.‖ These three ways correspond to the three states of which we have spoken. Every person who is struggling to attain to perfection must travel by one or another of these three roads; if he be a beginner in the spiritual life, he is in the purgative way; if he have made some progress, he is in the illuminative; and if he be perfect, he is in the unitive: as we shall see more clearly by and by.

32. The state of beginners thus belongs to such as are indeed in a state of grace, but whose passions are still in full strength. Such have need to wage perpetual war in order to uphold charity, which totters under the repeated assaults of their unsubdued appetites. These have no facility in the exercise of the virtues, but, on the contrary, practise them with great repugnance. The purgative way corresponds to this state, being wholly employed in

* In omni humano studio est invenire principium, medium, et finem; et ideo status spiritualis servitutis et libertatis in tria distinguitur: principium, ad quod pertinet status incipientium; medium, ad quod pertinet status proficientium; et finem, ad quem status perfectorum spectat. 2. 2. qu. 183, art. 4, in corp.

† De Vitâ Solit. Ad fratr. de monte Dei.

‡ Serm. 1. § De grad. curat.

‖ Tres illæ viæ, purgativa, illuminativa, et unitiva, est absurdum maximum quod dictum fuit in mysticâ. Prop. xxvi. inter damnatas ab Innocentio XI.

purifying the soul from the sins which it has committed, in correcting the evil habits which have been formed during the past life, and in curbing the violence of their as yet rebellious and violent passions. The state of proficients is that of such as have partially succeeded in subduing the revolt of their passions, and who in consequence have no difficulty in keeping themselves free from mortal sin; who persevere with courage in the practice of the moral and theological virtues, but who cannot, with the same ease, avoid falling into venial sins, because their affections and appetites are not yet thoroughly under control nor sufficiently repressed. The illuminative way answers to this state, which, full of light, enables all efforts to be directed to the uprooting of the passions, and the practice of real and solid virtue. The state of the perfect belongs to those who have gained a complete victory over their passions; who refrain with ease from every sin, both mortal and venial; and who have a readiness in performing acts of all the virtues, especially of the love of God. The unitive way corresponds to this state, in which the soul, being settled in a calm and peaceful security, unites itself without difficulty to God with the bond of divine love. This explanation, which entirely squares with our argument, is taken from St. Thomas.*

33. The Angelic Doctor illustrates this spiritual progress by a comparison with the growth of the human body. Man is born an infant, and at that imperfect age has not the use of his reason, nor even of his limbs, which he knows not how to employ; so that he is very properly confined in swathing bands. The child, advancing in years, gradually acquires command of his reason, and is even able to make good use of his limbs and senses; still, in this stage of growth, something more is wanting to

* Primo quidem incumbit homini studium principale ad recedendum a peccato, et ad resistendum concupiscentiis ejus, quæ in contrarium caritatis movent: et hoc pertinet ad incipientes, in quibus caritas est nutrienda, vel fovenda, ne corrumpatur. Secundum autem studium succedit, ut homo principaliter intendat ad hoc quod in bono proficiat: et hoc studium pertinet ad proficientes, qui ad hoc principaliter intendunt, ut in eis caritas per augmentum roboretur. Tertium autem studium est, ut homo ad hoc principaliter intendat ut Deo inhæreat et eo fruatur, et hoc pertinet ad perfectos, qui cupiunt dissolvi et esse cum Christo. 2. 2. qu. 24, art. 9, in corp.

the perfect use of limbs, senses, and reason. At length he arrives at manhood with all his limbs fully formed, and all the powers of his mind developed; and now is able to perform every act proper to man, with full perfection. This development, the Saint observes, which we see taking place slowly in the body, takes place imperceptibly in the soul also, in the manner explained above.*

34. This will be made more clear from an example. St. Ignatius received into his Society, as a lay brother, a young man, who, on entering the Noviciate, brought with him a Crucifix with our Blessed Lady at the feet of our Lord. It was quite a work of art, of great value, and he held it most dear. The Saint was well aware that this was not the kind of thing for a Religious to keep, more especially a Novice, who, in what he is allowed for his private use, must not be different from the rest of the Community. However, he made no remark, and did not take away the Crucifix, but in the course of time, seeing him well grounded in the practice of every religious virtue, the Saint pronounced those memorable words, "Now that our Brother carries the Crucifix in his heart it is time to take it out of his hands."† He did so, and the Novice showed no more concern than if he had never had it in his possession. In this instance we discern the different states of a person who aspires to perfection, and the different degrees of spiritual strength which he possesses. At first, when the young man still clung to the world, and was weak in virtue, the Saint did not venture to deprive him of the dearly treasured Crucifix; for he well knew that in the first state of a beginner, the strength needed to overcome an attachment was wanting; but when he saw that the heart of the youth was disengaged from the world, and trained in virtue, and that some spark of the love of God was already enkindled in his breast, he deprived him of the Crucifix without any scruple, and with the happiest result; for in the stage of advancement, virtue is stronger, and better able to bear the test of trials and sacrifices.

* Spirituale augmentum caritatis considerari potest quantum ad aliquid simile corporali hominis augmento. Eod. loco.

† Virg. Nolarci, Vita di S. Ignazio. cap. 30.

35. With reference to this subject, I should not omit to notice the different modes of treatment employed by the same great Saint towards Father Ribadeneira, when this Jesuit first started as quite a youth in the race of religious perfection, and when in riper years he had reached the goal of this perfection. This good Father, in the early part of his Noviciate, was by no means observant of strict discipline; and what is worse, he was a source of annoyance and disturbance to others by his boyish tricks. All the Fathers complained of him, and all thought that he deserved to be severely punished, and even to be dismissed from the Order, as giving annoyance to every one. St. Ignatius, however, not only would never allow him to be sent away, but would not even punish him with the severity which his childish follies seemed to call for. But when the same Father had arrived at maturity, not of years only, but of perfection, the Saint adopted a different course with him, and imposed very severe penances for the slightest faults, for which perhaps in the sight of God he was in nowise to blame. So much so, that when Ribadeneira had gone on a certain day some distance out of Rome in company of two Bishops of the Society, who were starting for Ethiopia, and had returned home rather late, the Saint imposed a fast on bread and water as a penance for this breach of rule, although it was committed in compliance with the dictates of fraternal charity. It may be asked, why at one time so much indulgence was shown to the very person who at another time was treated with so much rigour. The reason is, that the Saint was well aware of the inequality of spiritual strength in Novices just beginning to practise perfection, and in those who, after a lapse of years, had already acquired it; hence, in the government of his subjects, he paid more attention to the stage of perfection which they had attained, than to their defects. A Director, then, who wishes to avoid falling into serious mistakes, should take a lesson from this Saint and learn how to discriminate in the persons he is training to virtue the different states of perfection which we have above explained.

36. Before concluding this Chapter, I will point out some inferences, which follow from what has been said, and which will be of great help to Directors in using this book to the advantage of

their penitents. This first Section (in which I am speaking of the means of perfection) regards every person without distinction, in whatever state of virtue he may be, because the use of prayer and meditation, the Sacraments, the exercise of the presence of God, and the like, are necessary to all, whether beginners, proficients, or perfect, who wish to make progress in their own state. The second Section is intended more particularly for beginners, since their special task is to remove by continual mortification, all hindrances to charity, namely sins, evil habits, and disordered affections ; as St. Thomas observes.* The third Section is addressed principally to proficients, who, having in a great measure subdued their passions, are engaged more especially, by the practice of the moral virtues, in acquiring those dispositions which positively dispose the soul to yield increase of divine love.† The fourth Section is adapted for the perfect, who, having removed the obstacles encountered by beginners, and having acquired the virtues of proficients, are chiefly engaged in keeping up an intimate union with God by means of holy love.‡ This division will show Directors that the whole object of the present work is to conduct souls by due method along the ordinary paths of grace, to the highest summit of Christian perfection.

CHAPTER IV.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS TO DIRECTORS ON THE SUBJECT OF THE PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

37. FIRST. My plan has led me in the present Article merely to give an outline of the three different states of perfection which I

* Illis, in quibus caritas incipit, quamvis proficiant, principalior cura imminet, ut resistant peccatis, quorum impugnatione inquietantur. 2. 2. qu. 24, a. 9, ad 2.

† Hanc impugnationem minus sentientes jam quasi securius intendunt ad profectum. Eod. loco.

‡ Perfecti etiam in caritate proficiunt : sed non est ad hoc principalis eorum cura ; sed etiam eorum studium circa hoc maxime versatur ut Deo inhæreant. Eod. art 9d 3.

have shown to exist in beginners, in the more advanced, and in the perfect. We have seen that the whole study of those who are in the first stage must be directed to subduing the passions, as yet still strong and rebellious against reason; and that they must not as yet expect to feel readiness and alacrity in the practice of virtue. Nevertheless, a Director will occasionally meet with beginners only who are so fervent in prayer, so eager for corporal austerities, so zealous in obedience and mortification, as to make it appear that all vice is dead in them, and the flame of concupiscence quenched. Let not, however, the Director place too much confidence in such persons, nor form too high an opinion of them, for all is not gold that glitters. All the willingness they manifest to perform good works of every kind is a pleasing make-show of virtue, but it is not real virtue; for it proceeds solely from the effect of sensible grace and of spiritual consolations, which lull their passions to sleep, and give them an impulse towards good. Now this is not true and solid virtue, but merely the effect of a sweet and consoling grace working within the soul. Genuine virtue, I own, is a readiness in the performance of good works, but a readiness acquired by their constant practice, and it is so deeply rooted in the soul as to weaken, or even destroy, all contrary inclinations, insomuch that these have little or no influence—at least over the will—to move it from its virtuous course, both in seasons of aridity and in time of consolation. But all this is acquired only amidst temptations, afflictions, and contradictions, and after repeated victories over ourselves. Hence true virtue cannot possibly be found in beginners, who cannot have stood the test of many and serious conflicts. We see every day in the Noviciates of the most exemplary Religious Orders, young persons, fervent in prayer, cheerfully exact in the observance of every rule, and prompt in the performance of every act of humility, mortification and charity. Yet we notice that many, when they have finished their Noviceship, become tepid in prayer, negligent in the discharge of their duties, cold in the practice of every religious virtue. All this clearly proves that the zeal which they showed in the beginning of their conversion was not real virtue, but only the

impulse of sensible grace. A Director, then, must not allow himself to be deceived in the opinion he forms of beginners, nor trust much to the quickness of their pace at starting.

38. Secondly. With reference to proficients, we have remarked that these have already subdued their passions to a great extent, and are wholly engaged in the exercise of virtue; yet the Director will meet with some proficients whose passions are more violent than those of any beginner, or even than were their own in the commencement of their conversion. Such persons often have a great difficulty and even extreme repugnance in the exercise of each single virtue. Nor need we be surprised; for this conflict does not usually arise from the intrinsic character of their souls, but only from the external assaults of the devil, who envies their improvement; and by a special permission of God, Who wishes to lead them to higher perfection. Hence a Director must bear in mind that there are holy and thoroughly devoted servants whom our Lord is pleased to leave in that painful state called "passive purgation of sense," in order that their virtue may be the more refined. God slackens the devil's chain, and permits him to molest them with horrible temptations of various kinds, such as the great bulk of the faithful are not subject to. He also permits them to be strangely troubled by their passions; and His object throughout is, that persons bravely battling amidst such rude conflicts, may acquire solid virtue, that by such means they may later on reach a very high perfection, and many of them even some degree of infused contemplation. We may learn from the life of St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi, how much she suffered in the "Lion's Den" in which God placed her, this being precisely the purgation of which we are speaking. In this chosen soul, full of perfect dispositions, highly favoured by God with very many ecstasies and sublime visions, we see so fierce a tempest of the passions, such dreadful assaults of temptations, that the mere reading of them moves us to compassion. Now all this tumult of the passions, occasionally met with in proficients, and this difficulty—or as sometimes happens, disgust felt in the performance of good works—have not their origin in the natural character of the persons tempted, but are purely accidental, inasmuch as they proceed from

external causes. Indeed, when the terrible combat with the devil is over, they return to their natural state, with their passions well ordered and subdued, and enjoy the sweets of peace. A Director, then, must be careful not to form an unfavourable opinion of such persons: he must esteem them as much as he did before these outbursts of passion began; nay even more, on account of the great spiritual profit which is commonly derived from these interior troubles.

39. Thirdly. With regard to the perfect we have already remarked that they have subdued all their passions, that they abstain from even slight faults, and that they readily practise acts of charity, and live in union with God. We must, however, have a sound and correct understanding of this statement. In the preceding chapters I have established the two following truths: First, that in this miserable life, no one can become so perfect as not occasionally to feel some excitement of the passions, some slight rebellion of the sensitive appetite: Secondly, that no spiritual person can reach such purity of conscience as no longer to be sullied by any venial sin. It follows consequently that the highest perfection of the saints here below is reduced to this, that their passions being mortified create little disturbance in them, are easily and quickly overcome, and that the venial sins which they commit are not fully deliberate, and are rapidly effaced by the good and meritorious works which are familiar to them. This is the view of Suarez* and the teaching of St. Augustine. That man is perfect, says the holy Bishop of Hippo, who falls not into the more serious sins—those, namely, which are committed with full deliberation—and who strives by almsgiving and other good works to purify his soul from the sins he has committed.†

40. Nor, says the Angelic Doctor, does the perfection of our present state require that we should be united to God by a continual and uninterrupted exercise of love: such perfection belongs

* De Relig. tom. iij., c. 3, n. 22.

† Ingredi sine maculâ non absurde ille dicitur, qui ad ipsam perfectionem irreprehensibiliter currit, carens criminibus damnabilibus; atque ipsa peccata venialia non negligens mundare eleemosynis. De Perfect. Justit. lib. vj.

to our heavenly country, not to the slippery pathway of this life.* To be perfect here, it suffices that we find ease in the practice of union with God, so far as is consistent with the occupations in which it is the will of God that we should be engaged during our present life.

41. Much less, however, is it true that our perfection has bounds which cannot be passed, how great soever may be our advancement. It is clear that every man on earth is both able and bound to make continual progress in perfection. If he be already perfect, he ought more ardently than ever to aspire to the degree of perfection which is still wanting to him; because this very aspiration, as St. Bernard says, belongs to the perfection of his state. An unwearied desire of further advance in perfection, and an unceasing endeavour to attain it, in good truth are perfection.† To sum up then, in a few words, all that I have said under this heading, I repeat that the perfection which belongs to the present life consists in this, that the emotions of our appetites be moderate, seldom excited, and easily and quickly overcome; that no fully deliberate venial faults be committed; and that, with hearts and minds united to God, without difficulty, and as uninterruptedly as may be, we aspire after a more exalted perfection with ever increasing earnestness and fervour.

42. Fourthly. If a Director is anxious that his instructions should be useful to the souls which he has taken under his care, he must ever aim at securing perfection in the particular state in which they are for the time being; and he must not exact from them the perfection of any higher state. He must know how to be compassionate with them, and to bear with their defects, ever mindful that no one can perform more than his degree of strength allows. This precept is given by St. Bernard, and his words are worthy to be written in letters of gold. "Christian perfection," says the mellifluous Doctor, "is required of every one, but not of every

* Alia autem est perfectio, quæ attenditur secundum totalitatem absolutam ex parte diligentis, prout scilicet affectus secundum totum suum posse semper actualiter tendit in Deum: et talis perfectio non est possibilis in viâ, sed erit in patriâ. 2. 2. qu. 148, art. 2, in corp.

† Indefessum proficiendi studium, et ju is conatus ad perfectionem, perfectio reputatur. Epist. 253.

one in the same degree. If you are beginning, at least begin perfectly. If you are already in the path of perfection, go forward perfectly. If it seems to you that you have already obtained some degree of perfection, examine yourself, and strive to advance towards that which is still wanting to you."* For this purpose I have explained the three states of perfection, and have shown the difference between them, in order that a Director may be able to distinguish them in his penitents, and may discreetly and skilfully lead each one to perfection, according to the needs and powers of his particular state.

ARTICLE II.

The desire of perfection is the first means for its attainment; and this desire must never relax, but tend always to higher perfection. The motives which excite and increase such desire.

CHAPTER I.

THAT THE DESIRE OF CHRISTIAN PERFECTION IS THE MOST NECESSARY MEANS FOR ITS ATTAINMENT.

43. St. Augustine says that the life of a good Christian is one continued desire of perfection;† because whosoever entertains not always this holy longing in his heart, may be in some sense a Christian, but not a good one; for desires, as the Angelic Doctor teaches, are what dispose our souls, and tend to render them fit and

* Ab omnibus perfectio exigitur, licet non uniformis: sed si incipis, incipe perfecte: si jam in profectu es, et hoc ipsum perfecte age: si autem perfectionis aliquid attigisti, teipsum in teipso metire: et dic cum Apostolo: Non quod jam apprehenderim, aut jam perfectus sim: sequor autem si forte comprehendam, in quo comprehensus sum, etc. De Vit. Solit.

† Tota vita Christiani boni sanctum desiderium est. Tract. xiv. in 1 Epist. Joan.

ready to receive the good which is suitable to them.* And as no man in the world ever was successful in acquiring perfection in any art, either liberal or mechanical, without first efficaciously desiring success, so there never has been found, and there never will be found, in the Church of God, any soul attaining to Christian perfection without earnestly wishing to acquire it.

44. But to penetrate in its fulness so important a truth, we must examine into the arguments which prove it. There are two parts of the soul, again observes the same St. Thomas, in which desires of spiritual gifts have their residence; these desires are born in the rational and superior part of the soul; but they sometimes overflow, so to speak, into the animal and inferior part, filling it with ardour for holy objects, insomuch that even the body is moved to co-operate with the soul in promoting its spiritual advancement.† Holy desires, when they arise in the superior and rational part, are nothing else than movements of the will towards some spiritual excellence which it does not as yet possess, but which it knows to be within its reach. The reader must mark this well, if he wishes to make an exact analysis of these desires. I repeat, that desire always has reference to good which we do not as yet enjoy; for the blessings which we already possess do not excite desire in us, but rather joy, content, and happiness. Thus the ambitious man, when he is raised to the dignities and honours for which he had longed, desires them no more, but is glad and rejoices in them. I said, moreover, that desire regards the blessings which we hope to obtain; for good which we cannot possibly obtain excites not desire, but despair. Thus a traveller, impatient to reach his native land, desires speed of foot, not wings to his shoulders; because the one is possible, the other is impossible of attainment.

45. Let us dwell for a moment on this doctrine, since it substan-

* Desiderium quodammodo facit desiderantem aptum, et paratum ad susceptionem desiderati. P. 1. qu. 12, art. 6, in corp.

† Appetitus sapientiæ, vel aliorum spiritualium bonorum interdum concupiscentia nominatur, vel propter similitudinem quandam, vel propter intentionem appetitus superioris partis: ex quo fit redundantia in inferiorem appetitum, ut simul etiam inferior appetitus suo modo tendat in spirituale bonum, consequens appetitum superiorem, et etiam ipsum corpus spiritualibus deserviat. 1. 2. qu. 30, art. 1 ad 1.

tiates powerfully the truth of our proposition. We have said that desire is an affection of the will towards some good which is possible and suitable for it to obtain and possess. Hence if a Christian is not desirous of perfection, it is certain that he moves no act of his will to embrace and make it his own; the will remains motionless, indifferent, languid, and inert. How, then, is it possible that he can ever attain perfection? Can a person contending for the prize in a public race ever reach the goal without leaving the starting-post? How, then, can the will ever attain perfection if it does not move itself to acts directed towards that end? And this is the more true, because perfection is a blessing difficult to attain, and only to be acquired by means which are in themselves hard, and depend on the deliberate choice of the will. Now, if the will have no desire of perfection, if it refuse to make any effort to acquire the same, how can it overcome such difficulties? How will it be able to choose with courage and to maintain with perseverance a course so full of pain and hardship?

46. When these holy desires pass from the superior part of the soul and inundate the inferior, they show themselves in certain holy emotions tending towards the possession of those same spiritual gifts which have been the object of the previous acts of the will. It is unimaginable how much these sensible desires conduce to rapid advance in perfection by developing the sensitive appetite, stimulating and strengthening the will, and thus dilating the faculties of the soul, and rendering it capable of great efforts for good. St. Augustine illustrates this by a happy simile. He says that as a person who is to receive a great quantity of merchandise enlarges his sacks and vessels to their full extent, that they may be able to hold more of the wares, so desires enlarge the heart, and render it capable of containing great stores of spiritual wealth. And he adduces the example of St. Paul, who tells us that he neglected the past, and reached forward his desires, hoping to become fit to receive that further degree of perfection which yet remained for him to acquire.* The holy Doctor deduces from

* Desiderando capax efficeris, ut cum venerit quod videas, implearis. Sicut enim si velis implere aliquem sinum, et nosti quam magnum est quod dabitur, extendens sinum vel sacci, vel utris, vel alterius rei, nosti quantum missurus

this the consequence, that the whole life of a Christian must be one continual exercise of virtue by means of holy desires.* If this be so, what advance in perfection can we expect from him who has no desire of it? The superior part of his soul does not move towards perfection, and the inferior part is not inflamed; his will is inert and relaxed, his feelings fettered and cramped; in short, he cares little for perfection, he values it not, he lives in entire forgetfulness of it; it is as thoroughly impossible that he should advance a single step in the way of perfection as it would be for a traveller to arrive at the end of his journey by standing still. A Director must then ever bear in mind that good desires must be the very foundation-stone which it is his duty to lay in the heart of those penitents in whom he intends to raise the noble edifice of Christian perfection. Such desires are the seeds from which that tree is to spring up, which is to bear the fruit of every virtue, and, above all, the golden apple of divine charity. Unless this foundation-stone be laid, unless this seed be sown, it is folly to expect success in the undertaking.

47. In confirmation of this important truth, I will cite the example of a certain young man, once a votary of the world and its vanities, who, pierced to the heart with a powerful inspiration from on high, conceived so burning a desire of his eternal salvation and perfection, that he straightway determined to consecrate himself wholly to God in one of those monasteries which, far removed from the haunts of men, were enjoying at that time the highest reputation for sanctity. The greatest obstacle to the execution of his generous design arose neither from wealth nor from honours, nor from the pleasures and vanities of the world; for, made valiant by the force of his ardent longings, he, with great courage and

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es: et si videas, quia angustus est sinus, extendendo facis capaciorem: sic Deus differendo extendit desiderium, desiderando extendit animum, extendendo facit capacem. Desideremus ergo, fratres, quia implendi sumus. Videte Paulum extendentem sinum, ut possit capere quod venturum est. Ait: Non quia jam acceperim, aut jam perfectus sim, fratres, ego me non arbitror apprehendisse. Quid ergo agis in hâc vitâ, si nondum apprehendisti? Unum autem, quæ retro oblitus, in ea, quæ ante sunt, extentus, secundum intentionem sequor ad palmam supernæ vocationis. Tract. iv. in 1 Epist. Joan.

* Hæc est vita nostra, ut desiderando exerceamur.

promptitude, trampled under foot all these perishable things. But he soon found far greater difficulty in resisting the prayers and caresses of his mother. The first weapons she employed were tears; after followed words broken by sobs. "Will you then abandon me," she exclaimed, "in my old age? Will you bring me to my grave in sorrow?" "No," replied the youth, "I do not wish to bring upon you either sorrow or death; all that I wish is to save my own soul." "But," rejoined the mother, "cannot you save it in the world? Can you not save it if you live a Christian life at home?" "I can," answered the son, "but I wish not to run any risk, and therefore I am resolved to retire into the desert, and lead a perfect and saintly life in solitude." "Then," broke in the afflicted mother, "all the sacrifices I have made for you, from your infancy to the present hour, all are thrown away; lost my tender care, my pains, my trouble, and I shall be left alone to bewail my unhappy lot." "I have nothing further to add," answered the son; "I want to save my soul. Be calm, my mother; my heart is possessed by so lively a desire of salvation and sanctification that I cannot fight against it: I must follow the impulse I have received." His constancy at length triumphed over even a fond mother's heart; and full of lofty aspirations, he hurried to the monastery. There he applied himself with great fervour of spirit to penance, mortification, prayer, and every religious virtue. But as time went on, these holy desires lost some of their fervour; then they grew lukewarm, and were finally succeeded by a downright tepidity. So that he who, once borne on the wings of holy desires, seemed to soar to the very gates of paradise, now clogged and weighed down by the heavy chains of tepidity, was on the verge of falling into hell itself; and he would most assuredly have fallen into the abyss had not his mother appeared to him from heaven to rekindle in his heart the fervour of his former desires. The unhappy man being seized with a grievous sickness, was carried in spirit before the tribunal of God; and there, amongst many souls who were awaiting the sentence of their final doom, he beheld his mother. On recognising him she exclaimed, "Do my eyes deceive me! O my son, is it possible that I should live to behold you in this place under sentence

of eternal condemnation? What then have become of those holy desires to save your soul, and to secure your salvation in the austere life of the cloister?" * This reproof of his mother made so powerful an impression upon him, that, when he recovered the use of his senses, and was restored to health, he shut himself up in a narrow cell, and never again leaving it, spent the remainder of his life in weeping over his past infidelities. Let us ponder in this fact the great efficacy of holy desires in detaching souls from the allurements of the world, and leading them to the sublimest height of perfection, as well as our extreme spiritual weakness when not borne aloft by such aspirations. The mother of this erring Religious herself could find no means of bringing him back to the path of perfection, or even of salvation, except by reviving in his heart his former good desires, and bringing back to his mind the memory of his early fervour. Such then must be the commencement of a Director's labours on behalf of the souls which he designs to lead to perfection; he should always bear in mind the axiom of St. Augustine: That the life of a perfect Christian is nothing else than the going ever forward in the practice of virtue under the impulse of holy aspirations.†

CHAPTER II.

THE FIRST MOTIVE TO EXCITE A DESIRE OF PERFECTION. THE OBLIGATION ALL ARE UNDER TO BECOME PERFECT.

48. THE most effectual motive the Director can suggest in order to stir up those lukewarm souls, who, content with avoiding grievous falls, care not to amend their lives, is assuredly to inculcate the obligation imposed by God on each and every one to strive after perfection in his respective state. Jesus Christ speaks

* Quid hoc est, fili? Et tu in hunc locum condemnationis venisti? Ubi sunt sermones illi, quos loquebaris, dicendo: Salvare volo animam meam? In Lib. Doct. PP. Lib. de Comp. n. 5.

† Hæc est vita nostra, ut desiderando exerceamur.

clearly on this point, and speaks to all. Our Redeemer commands us to be perfect, and sets before us the model which we are to strive to realise; nothing less than the perfection of His heavenly Father.* St. James, the Apostle, will have us to be wholly perfect, and in nothing deficient.† St. Paul warns us to stand ever armed against the assaults of our enemies, and to be in all things perfect.‡ Not content with the perfection of our wills, the same Apostle requires that of our minds, which he would have us conform to the views of others by avoiding diversities of opinions.§ So that there can be no question as to our obligation of striving after the perfection suitable to our station.

49. But since according to the various conditions of different individuals, the perfection varies to which each must tend, the Director must distinguish, in order to act with method and discretion, between such as are Religious, consecrated to God by holy vows, and seculars who are free and their own masters; so as neither to heap burdens on some, nor exempt others from the obligations which they have contracted. If his penitent be a Religious man or woman, he must frequently remind such a one of the teaching of St. Thomas, that though not bound to be perfect, yet there is obligation under grievous sin, to tend to and aspire after perfection. He must warn penitents of this class that having by solemn engagements devoted themselves to religion, they are like apprentices who are put to learn the trade of a smith or carpenter; and that apprentices, though not bound to turn out perfect specimens of work in wood or iron, are yet obliged to perfect themselves in their trade: and though not worthy of blame for the blunders they may chance to make in their handiwork, still they would deserve both rebuke and chastisement were they not

* Estote ergo perfecti, sicut et Pater vester cœlestis perfectus est. Matth. v. 48.

† Patientia opus perfectum habet, ut sitis perfecti, et integri, in nullo deficientes. Jac. Epist. c. i. 4.

‡ Accipite armaturam Dei, ut possitis resistere in die malo, et in omnibus perfecti stare. Ad Ephes. vi. 13.

§ Obsecro autem vos, per nomen Domini nostri Jesu Christi, ut idipsum dicatis omnes, et non sint in vobis schismata: sitis autem perfecti in eodem sensu, et in eâdem sententiâ. I. ad Cor. i. 10.

to amend and to go on improving day by day:—even so, God will never call a Religious to account for not being perfect, since the religious state into which one has entered, is not a gathering of persons already perfect, but a school of perfection; yet will such a one be grievously guilty, and deserving of punishment, should he fail to strive after the perfection to which he is bound to aspire by his religious profession, and to amend and improve his life and conversation by the means his rule prescribes.* What St. Jerome wrote to Heliodorus, who had left the army for the monastic state, is most suited to our present purpose: "Heliodorus, bear in mind that thou hast promised God to be perfect. When having forsaken the army of an earthly prince, thou didst vow in thy monastery perpetual chastity, out of the yearning thou didst feel for thy heavenly country, what else didst thou do but vow unto God to lead a perfect life? Now remember that a perfect servant of Jesus Christ has nothing but Christ in his heart, else is he not a perfect servant of the Lord; and if despite his promise to God, he be not perfect, he is a liar in the sight of the Almighty, and by his lie has killed his soul."† As Suarez observes on this passage, St. Jerome does not mean that Heliodorus was bound to have fully attained to the sublime perfection above described, but only that it was his duty to aspire to it in desire, and to strive after it in action. This notwithstanding, his words are well fitted to alarm a slothful and lukewarm Religious who is careless in the service of God.

* Status autem religiosi est quædam disciplina, vel exercitium ad perfectionem perveniendi: ad quem quidem aliqui pervenire nituntur exercitiis diversis, sicut etiam medicus ad sanandum uti potest diversis medicamentis. Manifestum est autem, quod ille, qui operatur ad finem, non necesse convenit quod consecutus sit finem, sed requiritur, quod per aliquam viam tendat ad finem: et ideo qui statum religionis assumit, non tenetur habere perfectam caritatem; sed tenetur ad hoc tendere, et operam dare, ut habeat caritatem perfectam. 2. 2. quæst. 168, art. 2, in corp.

† Tu autem perfectum te fore pollicitus es: nam cum derelictâ militiâ te castrasti propter regna cœlorum, quid aliud quam perfectam secutus es vitam? Perfectus autem servus Christi nihil præter Christum habet; aut si quid præter Christum habet perfectus non est. Et si perfectus non est, cum se perfectum fore Deo pollicitus est, ante mentitus est, os autem, quod mentitur, occidit animam. In Epist. ad Heliod.

50. We may hence conclude, First, that every Religious is most strictly bound to the observance of the three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, which are the very counsels Jesus Christ has given us in His Gospel, and which a Religious has engaged himself by solemn oath to keep as a means of attaining to perfection.* Secondly, that he is strictly held to the observance of his rules, the means by which he has bound himself at his religious profession to tend to perfection. Such is the teaching of St. Thomas, who says: A Religious is not bound to every exercise whereby perfection may be attained, but only to such as are prescribed by the rule he has professed.†

51. The Director, doubtless, will have to meet the objection of which so many Religious avail themselves as an excuse for careless living, to wit, that their rule does not bind under sin. To this he must reply with St. Thomas; even granting that the infraction of this or that rule, which is not a strict precept, but only a counsel, does not imply grievous sin, supposing it take place through some small yielding to passion, or to self-love ever jealous of its liberty and averse to restraint and mortification (though in such case the Religious is not guiltless of venial sin on account of the motives more or less unreasonable which impel him to violate his rule), yet, if such transgressions proceed from contempt of the rule, they are grievously sinful.‡ And this, as Cajetan observes, because contempt of the rule implies contempt of God, Who has specially inspired the saintly founders of Religious Orders to draw up such rules, and to impose them upon their Communities. This contempt, as we learn from the holy Doctor already cited, consists herein, that a Religious first refuses subjection to the rule, and soon proceeds to break it boldly and defiantly.§ St. Bonaventure is of

* Si vis perfectus esse, vade, et vende omnia quæ habes, et da pauperibus et sequere me.

† Similiter etiam non tenetur ad omnia exercitia quibus ad perfectionem pervenitur, sed ad illa quæ determinate sunt ei taxata secundum regulam, quam professus est. 2. 2. quæst. 186, art. 2, in corp.

‡ Regula quantum ad ea, quæ excedunt communiter necessitatem præcepti, non obligat ad mortale, nisi propter contemptum. 2. 2. quæst. 186, art. 9, in corp.

§ Dicendum quod tunc committit aliquis, et transgreditur ex contemptu, quando voluntas ejus subjici renuit ordinationi legis, vel regulæ, et ex hoc pro

the same mind,* as also St. Bernard,† especially in his Constitutions. We must, however, remember that St. Thomas, after granting that individual violations of certain rules not of strict obligation, when committed without formal contempt of authority, are not of themselves grievously sinful, immediately adds that such breaches of rule, when of frequent occurrence, insensibly lead the Religious to a real contempt of the rule of his Order, to mortal sin, and consequently, at times, even to everlasting perdition.‡ It must further be borne in mind, that although a Religious who violates this or that rule, out of undue compliance with his imperfect inclinations, is not guilty of mortal sin—supposing always his disobedience do not degenerate into contempt—yet is he seriously bound to have, in general at least, mind and will intent on the observance of his rule; for that, having engaged himself at his profession to attain to the perfection proper to his Institute, he has thereby bound himself to employ the necessary means, which most assuredly can be none other than his rules. The Director, then, must never grow weary of dinning into the ears of such of his penitents as are Religious, the strict obligation they are under of tending to perfection by the observance of their rules and vows; for so long as the least remnant of the fear of God be left in them, this alone will suffice to stir up within them, not only desires of perfection, but strenuous efforts to attain it. He should have less hesitation in doing this, when he comes across Religious who are lukewarm, remiss and slothful, in the service of their Maker.

52. Let us come now to the question: What are we to say to persons living in the world, about their obligation of being perfect? The Director may rest assured that with seculars he will have to

cedit ad faciendum contra legem vel regulam. Quando autem e converso, propter aliquam particularem causam (puta concupiscentiam vel iram) inducitur ad aliquid faciendum contra statuta legis, vel regulæ, non peccat ex contemptu, sed ex aliquâ aliâ causâ: etsi frequenter ex eâdem causâ, vel ex aliâ simili, peccatum iteretur. In resp. ad 3.

* In Pharet. lib. ii., cap. 44.

† In lib. De Præcept. et Disp. et in Constitut.

‡ Sicut Augustinus dicit in libro De Naturâ et Gratiâ, quod non omnia peccata committuntur ex contemptu superbiæ. Frequentia autem peccati dispositive inducit ad contemptum, secundum illud Proverbiorum xviii.: Impius cum in profundum venerit peccatorum, contemnit.

take very much greater pains than with Religious in order to arouse them from their torpor, for they are generally imbued with the foolish idea that perfection is the business of monks and nuns only, and is no concern whatever of theirs; that as for themselves it suffices to keep the commandments of God and of the Church, in a lump as it were, and without refining upon them; and that having done thus much, they have done their whole duty. Nay, some will go so far as to make sport of those devout seculars who frequent the sacraments, devotions, and churches, who are constant in prayer, who employ themselves in works of mercy, and whose bearing is modest and retired; such they will call crook-necked, hypocrites, saints, bigots, and other similar titles of disdain unworthy of the mouth of any Christian who professes and venerates the teaching of Christ. Persons of this stamp have to be set free from so harmful a delusion by careful instruction. For this purpose, let them say what they understand by *Christian Perfection.* If they understand thereby that sublime and arduous perfection which is implied in the three gospel counsels, poverty, chastity, and obedience, they are right in considering it no concern of theirs; for not being called by God to the religious state, they are not bound to renounce their property, to forswear marriage, to lead a life of celibacy, or to subject themselves to the obedience of a superior who has to prescribe and appoint their every action. But if by Christian perfection they understand certain other counsels, and especially certain precepts in slight matters which have been laid by God on the whole mass of the faithful, as for instance, to live detached from property and wealth though they be possessed thereof; to make a good use of their means by devoting a portion of them to alms-deeds and to the divine service; to flee not only unlawful pleasures, but such occasions and incentives, both proximate and more or less remote, that allure and egg on thoughtless people to such gratifications; to behave with due modesty and circumspection in their outward dealings; to choose a spiritual guide for the internal regulation of their conscience; to despise the pomps and vanities, the splendour and pride of worldly life, and, if their station require them to keep up certain appearances, to preserve, amid the outward

circumstances of rank and wealth, the inward humility and lowliness of heart befitting a follower of Christ; to bear in patience wrongs, misfortunes, and trials of all kinds; to love their enemies, refraining not only from yielding to inward acts of resentment, but from all external marks of enmity; to mortify their passions, withholding from them all unreasonable gratifications; to avoid venial sins, especially such as are deliberate; to frequent the holy sacraments; to pray often; to reflect from time to time on the maxims of faith which avail so powerfully to keep us in check, and to make us walk cautiously amid the dangers which surround us; to do many other things commanded of God —even though their omission, on account of the slightness of the matter, be not grievously sinful—or merely counselled by Him, since without precautions of the kind it is morally impossible to lead a well-regulated life; if, I say, this is what they understand by Christian perfection, and they deem it no concern of theirs, inasmuch as they are seculars living in the world, then they are woefully mistaken, for to this perfection all who glory in the name of Christian are most surely called. Let us listen to what St. Thomas has to say on this point, after having examined it with all the rigour of the School: "All seculars, as well as Religious, are bound within the limits of discretion to do whatever good they can; as the Book of Ecclesiasticus warns us. There is, indeed, a way of fulfilling this precept by avoiding sin, when a person does what he can in the measure of the requirements of his condition, and is careful not to harbour contempt for the greater good which he might perform, placing thus a hindrance to his spiritual progress." * Seculars should observe that in this passage the holy Doctor speaks of "obligation," "precept," and "sin;" let them now say, if they have the courage, that perfection is the concern of Religious only.

* Omnes, tam religiosi quam sæculares, tenentur aliqualiter facere quidquid boni possunt: omnibus enim communiter dicitur, Eccl. ix.: Quodcumque potest manus tua, instanter operare. Est tamen aliquis modus hoc præceptum implendi, quo peccatum vitatur, scilicet si homo faciat quod potest, secundum quod requirit conditio sui statûs, dummodo contemptus non adsit agendi meliora, per quem animus firmatur contra spiritualem profectum. 2. 2. quæst. 186, art. 2, ad 2.

53. But, in truth, there is no need of alleging the authority of the great Doctor, for the Holy Scriptures are plain enough on this head. Let us ask to whom did St. James and the Apostle of the Nations address those Epistles wherein they are so earnest in inculcating perfection: whether to Religious only or to the mass of Christians? When Jesus Christ exclaimed with such energy, *Be ye perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect;* when He commanded self-denial, to bear the cross willingly, to be meek and lowly of heart even as Himself, to whom, pray, was He speaking? Was it only to monks, to religious, to cloistered virgins, or was it not rather to the whole body of believers who were desirous of being His true and faithful followers. "Jesus Christ," as St. Augustine says, "was then speaking to all. Nor are these His teachings to be listened to by virgins only, but not by married women—by widows, but not by those whom matrimony still holds in its bonds—by monks, but not by those who have taken to themselves wives—by the clergy, but not by the laity; no, the whole Church, the whole body of the faithful in their several ranks and degrees, are to follow Christ, bearing the cross upon their shoulders, and none are exempted from putting in practice His most holy lessons." * St. John Chrysostom, after having recited many of the admirable teachings wherein our Blessed Lord exhorts all to a perfect life, makes the apposite reflection that Christ has made no distinction between Religious and seculars, but addresses Himself indiscriminately to each and every one.† "And," the Saint continues, "what ruins the whole mass of mankind is the belief that Religious are bound to use all diligence to lead a perfect life, while seculars may, if they list, live heedlessly and remissly." ‡ "Not so, not so," he proceeds to say, "the same tenour of life is required of all; I say this with all assurance; though, in

* Non enim hoc virgines debent audire, et maritatæ non debent; aut viduæ debent, et conjugati non debent; aut clerici debent, et laici non debent. Sed universa ecclesia, universum corpus, cuncta membra per officia propria distincta et distributa sequuntur Christum. Serm. 47, De Div., cap. vii.

† Nec monachi, nec sæcularis nomen adjecit.

‡ Sed hoc plane est, quod evertit orbem universum, quod summa vitæ bene agendæ diligentia monachis opus esse arbitramur; ceteris negligenter vivere licere.

reality, it is not I that say it, but Christ Himself, the Judge of all men, Who says it with His own lips;" * and then, after having set forth at full length this most important truth, he winds up as follows: "I do not think that there can be any one so contentious and shameless as to deny that, as regards many points, both seculars and Religious are bound to tend to the very highest perfection." † A weighty authority indeed is this, which none may gainsay without incurring the reproach of great temerity. The Director may find herein wherewith to stir up desires of perfection in the torpid hearts of slumbering seculars, by showing them how strictly they are bound thereto, according to the teaching of the Holy Fathers and of the Sacred Scriptures. He will thus efface from the minds of such persons the pernicious delusion that perfection concerns those only who are shut up in the cloister; that on such alone it is incumbent to lead a devout, exact, and exemplary life; while seculars, provided they keep clear of mortal sin, are free to lead a soft, independent, and unmortified life. It is false, it is false, must he ever chime into their ears. All Christians are bound to perfection, for it is required of all, and in Holy Writ inculcated upon all. Those assuredly whose consciences are not seared, and who have some fear of God left, some care for their eternal welfare, will find in this thought an efficacious motive to exert themselves to enter upon a course of life more regular and exact.

54. But, the Director may ask, granting that every Christian is bound to strive after perfection, what is the precise guilt of a secular who, content with avoiding mortal sin, makes no account of lesser faults, and cares not to do works of charity and supererogation; in a word, esteems perfection a matter of no importance? I reply, that if such conduct proceed from contempt of perfection, the person has already incurred the guilt he wished to avoid. If,

* Non ita sane, non ita est; sed eadem ab omnibus philosophiæ ratio requiritur: atque id equidem vehementer affirmaverim; immo vero non ego, sed ipse judex omnium Christus.

† Itaque quod ad eandem vitæ diligentiam multis in rebus, supremumque perfectionis fastigium, per divinas leges pariter et sæcularis et monachus cogantur, neminem jam, quantumlibet ille sit contentiosus et impudens contradicturum existimo. Adver. Vitup. Vitam Monast., lib. iii.

however, he entertains no such sentiment, it is the opinion of Cajetan that a Christian who is heedless to this extent commits a venial sin.* Further, it is the view of Father della Reguera, in his "Mystical Theology," that a Christian who takes no thought for his perfection, is not free from mortal sin. I must remark, however, that this writer modifies his opinion, and puts various restrictions on it. In spite of all this, since other authors of name do not hold so rigorous a view, I will say—and what I here state I will prove in the following Chapter—that though a secular who neglects to tend to the perfection of his calling, may not sin by the very fact of his will being so perverted and badly disposed, yet will he fall into mortal sins of another class; he will lead a disorderly life, and will run great risk of everlasting ruin.

CHAPTER III.

SECOND MOTIVE TO EXCITE DESIRES OF PERFECTION. THE NECESSITY OF STRIVING AFTER IT, AS A MEANS NOT ONLY OF PERFECTION, BUT ALSO OF SALVATION.

55. THE reason why many of the faithful, whether Religious or secular, care not to acquire the perfection befitting their condition, is doubtless the conviction they entertain that by avoiding mortal sin they can live in the grace of God, and work out their salvation with less trouble and mortification. But they are sadly mistaken; for, allowing that we may, without grievous sin, set at naught that obligation of tending to the perfection suitable to our state which is taught by the Scriptures and the Holy Fathers, nevertheless it is most certain that they who neglect to apply themselves earnestly to become perfect, will fall into many other sins which are undeniably mortal, will live with a defiled con-

* De intentione vero quâ quis intendit non proficere in caritate aut bonis operibus, sed solum præcepta divina servare communi modo, dicendum, quod hujusmodi intentio peccatum est: quia firmando quis animum contra spiritualem profectum ponit, in quantum in se est, obicem directe Spiritui Sancto: non est autem peccatum mortale. In text. suprac D. Th.

science, and run a great risk of eternal damnation. Everybody knows that the archer must aim higher than the point he wishes to strike with his arrow. Just so, all may rest assured that no one will ever persevere in the observance of God's commandments, even to the extent of avoiding grievous transgressions, unless he aim at a somewhat more perfect keeping of the divine law; not merely shunning slight breaches thereof and venial faults, as far as is compatible with the frailty of fallen nature; but moreover, proposing to himself works of supererogation, which, though not a matter of strict precept, are yet of counsel, and no less advantageous to us than pleasing to God. We will now, as briefly as possible, consider how this holds good, and in the first place with reference to matters which are only of counsel.

56. Gerson boldly asserts, that it is very rare indeed for a Christian to keep all the ten commandments of God, unless he perform works of supererogation and follow the divine counsels, either by applying to prayer, frequenting the sacraments, or by mortifying his flesh with fasting or other austerities, alms-deeds, works of spiritual and corporal mercy, acts of devotion and veneration to the Saints and to Mary their Queen, or by doing other things of a like nature, which are not strictly commanded, but only recommended to us by a sweet counsel.* And Suarez, developing this truth with scholastic rigour, gives us his decision that it is impossible, morally speaking, for a Christian, though he be a secular, to maintain a steady and lasting purpose to avoid mortal sin, unless he also perform, and resolve ever to perform, many virtuous works that are not actually of precept.† This he proves by the analogy of nature, showing that natural substances cannot exist without the co-existence and companionship, so to speak, of the accidents or qualities which are proper to them. Thus, for instance, without heat fire is quenched; snow melts away as its coldness diminishes; air without motion becomes unwholesome; still waters soon grow

* Raro fiet ut homines præcepta strenue compleant, quin quodammodo supererogent, et misceantur consiliis. Alphab. 68, part. ii., litt. 2.

† Vix potest moraliter contingere ut homo etiam sæcularis habeat firmum propositum numquam peccandi mortaliter, quin consequenter nonnulla opera supererogationis faciat, et habeat formale vel virtuale propositum illa faciendi. De Relig., tom. iv. lib. i. c. 4, num. 12.

putrid; plants, fruits, and all other natural products, deprived of their native qualities, are spoiled and at length corrupt. Thus, too, he continues, the grace of God and His love dwindle and eventually perish without good works, which are the supernatural qualities that strengthen, nourish, protect, and develop them. So that a wretched soul, stripped of divine grace through its sloth and listlessness in doing good, finds itself in great danger of everlasting perdition.

57. God Himself taught this very truth to Blessed Henry Suso in the famous vision of the Nine Rocks, which was vouchsafed to him that he might make it known to the whole world. Being rapt in ecstasy, the servant of God beheld a lofty mountain, the summit of which reached the stars. Nine rocks, each one supported on the top of the one nearest to it, were seen on the mountain side, and in every rock there were dwellers; more in some, fewer in others. By these nine rocks were signified the nine degrees of perfection a man may attain to in the course of his mortal life. Now, as the holy man stood wondering at the height of the mountain, and the situation of these rugged and precipitous rocks, he found himself all at once stationed on the summit of the first of these crags, whence he was able to take a bird's-eye view of the whole earth, which appeared to him to be covered with an immense net. In his astonishment at this sight, he besought our Lord to make known to him what was meant by this net, which, though covering the whole earth, did not reach the rocks on the mountain side. Christ answered, that these snares represented those which the demons lay for men, the bonds and chains of vice and evil habits wherein the most wicked one holds nearly the whole world in bondage; that the net reached not to the rocks of the mystic mount since those who had climbed up to them were Christians, who were free from the guilt of deadly sin. The holy man next inquired who were those whom he saw about him on the first rock. He was answered as follows: These are lukewarm, cold, slothful, and indolent men, who fancy not, nor aim at great actions, but are content to live in the resolve never to consent to a mortal sin, and never to advance higher.* Now mark:

* B. Henry Suso. The Book of the Nine Rocks. Chap. x.

it is exactly of this class of men that I am now treating. The servant of God questioned our Lord anew, asking whether such as they would be lost or saved, for he saw them in close neighbourhood to the snares and toils. The answer was given in the following words: If they die with consciences clear from deadly guilt, they will be saved; but their danger is greater than they are aware, as they persuade themselves that they may satisfy both God and nature—which is difficult, not to say impossible—and to persevere under such circumstances in God's grace is by no means easy. And, in fact, the holy man saw many falling off the first rock, and seeking shelter under the net itself. He immediately asked the meaning of this occurrence, and received for reply that the rock afforded no footing to such as yielded to mortal sin; but as they who dwelt on it were lukewarm and slothful, they easily fell, and returned to their lusts and vices. This vision needs no further explanation, because our Lord shows by it so very clearly, that cold and lukewarm Christians, who content themselves with avoiding mortal sin, and care not to perform works of supererogation, are liable to fall into those very sins they purpose to avoid, and live in great danger of eternal ruin.

58. But there is another reason why it must be morally impossible for persons to keep the commandments of God in their essentials, and have no desire of perfection; for their manner of life leads them to commit numberless venial sins, which will certainly pave the way to those grievous transgressions against the commandments which they would fain avoid. Hence the son of Sirach says, *He that contemneth small things shall fall little by little.** Whence St. Thomas infers that those who are in the habit of venial sin may be said to despise small things;† and thus they dispose themselves by insensible degrees to a grievous fall from grace: and he accounts for this by adding, that when people take no heed of slight breaches of God's commandments, they accustom their will to disobedience, and to a very dangerous

* Qui spernit modica, paulatim decidet. Ecclus. xix. 1.

† Ille qui peccat venialiter, videtur minima spernere. Ergo paulatim disponitur ad hoc, ut totaliter defluat per peccatum mortale. 1. 2. quæst. 88, art. 3.

freedom, so that it easily comes at length to shake off altogether the yoke of the divine law.* Facts of daily occurrence may be appealed to in illustration of what we here advance: let us take one from amongst a thousand. A young girl begins to pay too much attention to her personal appearance, with a view to improve it, either not to be thought plain, or to make herself very attractive; from vanity in dress she will soon pass to allowing herself full liberty of looking at any and every object; this unchecked roving of her eyes will some day awaken in her heart an affection, by no means sinful in its beginning, but too tender and dangerous; this feeling degenerates by degrees, the demon trepans her into an intrigue, and she comes at length to trample under foot the flower of her virginity. Behold how from small sins we descend, as by so many steps, into great ones, until we are plunged into the abyss. St. Ambrose, speaking of women, seems to allude to a case of this description.† Or again, a person may be too ready to speak of his neighbour's failings; he next comes to put an evil interpretation upon his actions, and to speak publicly in his dispraise. Urged on at length by an itching desire of making good his accusations, he publishes some great sin of his neighbour which had hitherto been secret; and by a grievous sin of detraction, casts a stain on his character. Thus it is that men are led on step after step from venial to deadly sin.

59. We may read the same lesson in a memorable incident recorded in Exodus. Moses had scaled the summit of Mount Sinai; he had penetrated into the thick clouds that capped the peak of the mountain, and there had held long and familiar discourse with his God, from Whose lips he received the heavenly oracles. But what were the Israelites doing meanwhile at the foot of the mountain? The sacred text informs us; they were all waiting in idleness and indolence till their great prophet should

* Qui peccat venialiter ex genere, prætermittit aliquem ordinem: et ex hoc quod consuescit voluntatem suam in minoribus debito ordini non subjicere, disponitur ad hoc quod etiam voluntatem non subjiciat ordini ultimi finis, eligendo id, quod est peccatum mortale ex genere.

† Hinc illa nascuntur incentiva vitiorum, ut quæsitis coloribus ora depingant, dum viris displicere formidant; ut de adulterio vultûs meditentur adulterium castitatis. Lib. de Virgin.

come back to them.* So far no other harm was done than a little slothfulness and loss of time. Having nothing whatever to do, they began to invite one another to feasting and merry-making.† Friends and kinsfolk met and banqueted together on the green sward: soon the bounds of moderation in eating and drinking were overstepped. No great harm, one may say; only a little gluttony, only a little drunkenness. Being flushed with what they had taken, *they rose up to play.*‡ Men and women, young men and maidens, mingle in the mazes of the dance, and swell their voices in one common chorus. They play, they laugh, they dance, they joke, but without any evil feeling. What harm was there in this? Perhaps a little too much freedom, some want of modesty; hence a lower depth in venial sin. On, then, on: there is no mortal sin as yet. At length, blinded by drink, and made reckless by the license they had been allowing themselves, the people begin to complain to one another: "God only knows when Moses will come down to us from the mountain-top, or how long we shall have to stay in this valley. Why tarry, why wait any longer? Let us make to ourselves a visible God, as they are wont to do in Egypt. Take, Aaron, take all our ear-rings, and gold ornaments, and make us an image worthy to be set up on our altars." Aaron yields to their demand. A golden calf is cast and put up for the adoration of the people, who sacrilegiously burn incense before it, and offer abominable sacrifices. See now the evil there may be in a little idleness, in some slight excess in eating and drinking, in too great freedom between the sexes. By such steps as these the wretched Israelites came at length to fall down in abject idolatry before a golden calf. This is not a commentary of my own: I am doing nothing but quoting St. Gregory: "Eating and drinking led the people to revel; revelling drew them into idolatry: for if we check not ourselves in lesser temptations, we shall soon fall into some great sins, as Solomon declares in the words, *He that contemneth small things shall fall little by little.* And of a truth, if we are heedless in small matters, we shall be gradually led astray by

* Sedit manducare et bibere, et surrexerunt ludere. Exod. xxxii. 6.
† Sedit manducare et bibere.
‡ Sedit manducare et bibere, et surrexerunt ludere.

habit and by passion, and of a surety fall into grievous sins."* Let those then delude themselves who wish to save their souls, and think that they can without the perfect keeping of God's commandments; sooner or later they will have their eyes opened by a grievous fall, and God grant that they may not be undeceived only when they find themselves in hell.

CHAPTER IV.

DESIRE OF PERFECTION NECESSARY FOR ITS ATTAINMENT; WE MUST NEVER RELAX, BUT STRIVE CONSTANTLY AFTER HIGHER PERFECTION.

60. We have hitherto shown that the foundation of the spiritual building of Christian perfection is the earnest desire to attain it, and we have furnished Directors with the means of laying this foundation in the hearts of their penitents; in other words, we have suggested certain motives which may serve to stir up these holy desires within the soul. We must next proceed to show that this foundation will be of little use unless it be firmly set and immovably fixed in the hearts of men. Or, waiving all metaphor, we have to prove that such desires, to be effectual, must never slacken or grow cool; but that when one step in perfection has been made good, we should aspire to a further height; for, if this be not done, our former labours will be of no avail, and we shall speedily relapse into our original lukewarmness.

61. Before, however, bringing any authorities in support of this assertion, we will adduce proofs from reason, to the end that the

* Sedit populus manducare et bibere, et surrexerunt ludere. Esus quippe potusque ad lusum impulit; lusus ad idololatriam traxit: quia si vanitatis culpa nequaquam caute compescitur, protinus ab iniquitate mens incaute devoratur, attestante Salomone, qui ait: Qui spernit modica, paulatim decidet. Si enim curare parva negligimus, insensibiliter seducti etiam majora perpetramus.

sayings of the Fathers, and the warnings of the Divine Scriptures, may not seem exaggerated. Christian perfection has no determinate limit beyond which we may not advance—in the sense that he who has reached that term is to be spoken of as perfect, while they who lag behind are to be called imperfect. Such limit is found in the liberal and mechanical arts; for, an artisan, an architect, or a painter, if they succeed in producing works in full conformity with the rules of their respective arts or handicrafts, may be said to be perfect in their line, and will scarcely have any further progress to make. But Christian perfection has no such limits, as it mainly consists in charity, which may increase in the measure of the goodness of God, which is its formal object. For, St. Thomas observes, as the claims which God has to our love are boundless, charity can ever add fresh ardour and indefinite intensity to its flames.* He thence infers what we have already stated, to wit, that in this life it can know no bounds.† Consequently, there can be no limit whatever to our perfection. The same may be said of all those means helping to attain perfection, which form instrumental perfection; for if we consider this as removing the obstacles in the way of charity by mortifying our lusts and senses, it knows no term, since our passions can never be wholly brought under, and must therefore be incessantly mortified and held in check. And if we take it on its positive side, as disposing us for an increase of charity by the perfect exercise of every virtue, it is plain that it can never reach its limits, as our virtues are always susceptible of improvement. If, then, this be the case, if our perfection can have no limits, nor remain stationary in any resting-place, it follows of necessity that it consists in an unceasing progress in the moral virtues, and in a constant increase of charity. Hence let no one fancy himself perfect who, having reached a certain degree of charity, will go no farther; rather let him, after he has sufficiently overcome the obstacles in the path of charity, advance in virtue, and intensify

* Semper caritas in viâ potest magis, et magis augeri. 2. 2. quæst. 24, art. 7, in corp.

† Unde relinquitur quod caritatis augmento nullus terminus præfigitur in hâc vitâ.

within his heart the ardours of Divine love. My conclusion, then, is, that if our desires of perfection are to have their true result, they must never cool, but grow more and more ardent, and ever aim at higher flights; for, since our perfection has no limits, we should set no bounds to our desires of attaining to it.

62. Solomon has this very thing in view when he tells us that the path of perfection wherein the just man walks ever grows in brightness and in the splendour of increasing virtue, until it reaches the full noontide of the glories of Paradise.* The Royal Prophet sets forth the same idea: Blessed is the man who has settled in his heart to advance in the way of perfection as long as he sojourns in this vale of tears; for, with the blessing and the help of the Lord, our Lawgiver, he shall rise from virtue to virtue, until he come to behold his God face to face, in the blessed Sion of the heavenly Jerusalem.† We may observe that the Psalmist calls him blessed whose heart ever aspires to greater perfection; and this is equivalent to saying that such a one is perfect, for in perfection does our blessedness here below consist, and on it depends our everlasting bliss. *Let him that is just*, says Christ in the Apocalypse, *become justified still; him that is holy, become sanctified still.*‡ So true is it that Christian perfection knows no halting-place, and that he is the most perfect who ever aspires to greater perfection.

63. Let us now hearken to what the great Apostle of the Gentiles has to say on this point. There is no question but that he was one of the greatest of the Saints, and, so to say, a star of the first magnitude in the firmament of Holy Church. What persecutions, what sufferings, what toils did he not undergo for Christ's sake! What burning charity he had, what transports of love, what zeal for the honour of Jesus! Who may fully relate all his revelations, his visions,

* Justorum autem semita quasi lux splendens procedit, et crescit usque ad perfectum diem. Prov. iv. 18.

† Beatus vir cujus est auxilium abs te: ascensiones in corde suo disposuit, in valle lacrymarum, in loco quem posuit: etenim benedictionem dabit legislator, ibunt de virtute in virtutem, videbitur Deus Deorum in Sion. Ps. lxxxiii. 9.

‡ Qui justus est, justificetur adhuc, et sanctus sanctificetur adhuc. Apoc. xxii. 11.

his ecstasies; his being rapt even to the third heaven? Yet the holy Apostle, though enriched with so many virtues and so high gifts, did not deem himself perfect, as he himself declares.* He tells us how he had been stoned, frequently scourged, often shipwrecked in mid ocean, tossed night and day by the waves.† He mentions his many watchings, his frequent fasts, the hunger and thirst, the nakedness and cold suffered by him for the love of our Lord.‡ He speaks of his having been taken up to the third heaven while yet in mortal flesh.§ He was even able to say that he lived no longer in himself, but wholly in Christ, for that he was transformed into Him by love.‖ Yet with all this he declares his persuasion that he had not reached perfection.¶ But, O Doctor of the Gentiles, if all these things suffice not to make you perfect, to what means do you attribute your having acquired the perfection you reached—how did you attain such a height of sanctity? *Sequor autem si comprehendam*, he answers. "I go forward as far as I can in the path of perfection: I stretch forth ever by desires and works to what is before me in the race." The Gloss on this passage makes an observation which is quite to our point: "Let no Christian, though he may bethink him to have made great spiritual progress, ever say, Enough, now I can rest; for by speaking thus he forsakes the way of perfection before he has yet arrived at the term of everlasting bliss."**

64. Nor is St. Augustine of another mind: "The best—that is the most perfect—man, is not he who, having reached a certain degree of perfection, halts there, but rather is he who ever tends to God, our unchangeable Life, with the most ardent yearnings of his heart,

* Non quod jam acceperim, aut jam perfectus sim. Ad Philip. iii. 12.

† Ter virgis cæsus sum, semel lapidatus sum, ter naufragium feci, nocte et die in profundo maris fui. 2 Cor. xi. 25.

‡ In vigiliis multis, in fame et in siti, in jejuniis multis, in frigore et in nuditate. Ibid. 27.

§ Raptus est in paradisum, et audivit arcana verba, quæ non licet homini loqui. Ibid. xii. 14.

‖ Vivo ego jam non ego; vivit vero in me Christus. Ad Galat. ii. 20.

¶ Non quod jam acceperim, aut jam perfectus sim. Ad Philip. iii. 12.

** Nemo fidelium, etsi multum profecerit, dicat, Sufficit: qui enim hoc dicit de viâ exit ante finem.

and who ever unites himself with God more and more closely."* St. Bernard is still more emphatic: "Perfection rightly understood is nothing else than an untiring endeavour to improve, a ceaseless striving after perfection. If therefore to be perfect is one and the self-same thing as to tend with all one's might to perfection, surely to fail in seriously applying ourselves to become perfect, is to be wanting in perfection. Where, then, shall we place those who are wont to say: 'Enough: we need not be better than those who have gone before us'?"†

65. But the reader may here charge me with inconsistency, since in the preceding Chapter I have stated that charity is the essence of Christian perfection, while now I appear to forsake this position and to make it consist, according to St. Paul and the holy Doctors above quoted, in a continual progress in virtue, and in an unweary ing desire of ever improving in spirit. But there is no contradiction in the two propositions: they are not at all incompatible with each other. True it is that our perfection consists essentially in charity, and that the means for attaining to it are the moral virtues and the counsels. But then our perfection requires as a necessary condition, without which it cannot be lasting, that charity and the other virtues should go on increasing ever and daily augmenting; for, unless they have this fixedness and solidity, perfection dwindles away and wholly vanishes. To the above reasoning I will add another argument, which will put the subject in the clearest light. I have already shown that, in order to be perfect, it is necessary that our desires should always tend to something higher, as Christian perfection has no limit: the further reason I have promised to give is this: not only is there no boundary beyond which perfection may not pass, but it neither has nor can have any halting-place at which it may tarry; to destroy it, nothing more is needed than to stand still and cease to go forward.

* Tunc quippe optimus est homo, cum totâ vitâ suâ pergit in incommutabilem vitam, et toto affectu inhæret illi. In lib. De Doct. Christ.

† Indefessum proficiendi studium, et jugis conatus ad perfectionem, perfectio reputatur. Quod si studere perfectioni, esse perfectum est, profecto nolle proficere, deficere est. Ubi sunt ergo qui dicere solent: Sufficit nobis si nolumus esse meliores quam patres nostri? Epist. 253 ad Abbat. Garivum.

66. Who is there that does not know, that has not felt, the fierce conflict which is ever being waged within us? We have as many domestic foes rising in rebellion against us, as we have passions that ruffle the calm of our souls, and by their lawless upheaving incite us to sin, and bear us towards never-ending ruin. It is hard to say which are the most impetuous, which the most dangerous: whether prodigality or covetousness, love or hate, presumption or despair, ambition or envy. This alone is certain, that, among the several passions, that single one which predominates within us suffices to drag us from the way of perfection, and to hurry us down the broad steep of perdition to irreparable ruin. Nor are our outward enemies—those bad spirits who hem us in on all sides—less to be feared; in every place their temptations surround us; wherever we have to tread they have prepared a snare for our feet to make us fall. We are thus compelled to be ever on the alert, armed with self-denial and all manner of virtue, and especially with ardent charity, so as to be able to beat down the insurrection of our domestic enemies, and to repel the attacks of foes from without. Hence, if it happen that any one, impressed with the idea of the progress he has made, wish to rest contented at the point he has reached, and thus grows slack in the practice of virtue, and allows his charity to cool, it is plain that the assaults of such numerous enemies will be successful, that he will be pierced with many wounds, and driven far from the path of perfection. If an army, marching with a generous enthusiasm to the siege of a fortress of which it is resolved to take possession, meet the enemy on its path, can it halt without; going either forward or backward? Assuredly not: for in its front there are those who attack and seek to drive it back; it must either put forth its strength against the foe and march bravely forward, or else shamefully turn its back and flee. So too he who has begun to climb up the mount of perfection cannot stand still midway, for he has too many foes who assail and harass him in a thousand ways. He must needs mount higher still, buoyed up and made valiant by the strength of his desires, else, should these grow languid, he will have to give way to the foe and beat a retreat.

67. It has been well said by St. Bernard that, "to halt in the way of perfection is to turn back:—hence let no one say: 'I have made sufficient progress; I will go no farther; enough for me to be what I was yesterday and in times past.'"* And in proof of this he alludes to Jacob's ladder, that lively symbol of Christian perfection; for on it no one stood still, but all were either going up or coming down. Whence he infers, whoever designs to stand still on some one step of the mystic ladder of perfection, attempts that which is impossible, and must fall to the ground.† But the mellifluous Doctor is still more emphatic in another letter of his, written to a monk who had allowed the desire of progress to slacken in his soul; for addressing him in the tone of familiar dialogue, the Saint proceeds as follows: "And so, O Monk, you refuse to go forward, and desire no further perfection. You wish then to turn back and to lose what you have made good?—Assuredly not. God forbid!—What then do you purpose?—I mean to live as I am, and to abide in the degree of perfection I have already reached. I intend to become neither better nor worse.—I can tell you then that what you propose is a sheer impossibility. Is there any one thing in this world that ever abides unchanged? Does not the Holy Ghost say of man himself that, *he fleeth like a shadow and never continueth in the same state!*"‡ In other passages of his letters the same holy Doctor rallies those lukewarm and languid souls whose desires of perfection grow less earnest, by contrasting them with worldlings who are never satisfied with perishable goods. He tries in this manner to shame and arouse the tepid by their example. "Did you ever meet with an ambitious man," he writes, "who, after attaining to one dignity, did not hanker

* Non proficere, sine dubio deficere est. Nemo proinde dicat: Satis est: sic volo manere: sufficit mihi esse sicut heri, et nudius tertius. Ep. 342.

† In viâ residet, qui hujusmodi est. In scalâ subsistit, ubi neminem patriarcha vidit non ascendentem, aut non descendentem. Dico ergo: qui se æstimat stare, videat ne cadat.

‡ Monache, non vis proficere? Non. Vis ergo deficere. Nequaquam. Quid ergo? Sic, mihi inquis, vivere volo et manere, quo perveni, nec pejor fieri patior, nec melior cupio. Hoc ergo vis, quod esse non potest. Qui enim fiat in hoc sæculo? et certe de homine specialiter dictum est: Fugit velut umbra et nunquam in eodem statu permanet. Epist. 253 ad Abbat. Garivum.

after one of a higher grade?* What shall I say of the covetous? Are they not ever thirsting after increase of gain? Are men of pleasure ever sated with their luxury? Do not the vain-glorious ever go in quest of new honours? If, therefore, the desires of persons who are bent on obtaining the trifles of earth be thus insatiable, should we not blush to be less eager after spiritual goods, less bent on perfection?"† These convincing arguments and just rebukes may enable the Director to awaken within himself and others desires of greater perfection, and not to suffer holy aspirations to become less ardent; for should this take place, the result is, that virtuous works cease, no progress is made, there is a stand-still in the road of perfection; and, as we have seen, to stop is to go backward, and even sometimes to fall without hope of recovery.

68. I must own that for my part I have always been most deeply impressed by the wondrous arts employed by God to keep alight in the heart of the celebrated Paphnutius those desires of ever-increasing perfection, whereby the Almighty had designed to lead him to the very highest sanctity.‡ This holy man dwelt in the desert of Thebais, and yielded to none of the Solitaries, but rather excelled them all, in the austerity of his life, the assiduity of his prayer, the purity of his conscience, and his practice of every virtue. God, seeing that no one in that desert could spur him on to a greater perfection by the example of superior virtue, made use of other unwonted and extraordinary means to quicken within him yearnings for greater progress. He implanted in his breast the desire of knowing what man living in the world was his equal in perfection: and as he was beseeching the Lord to discover this to him, an Angel was sent from above to answer his prayer with the message that he was to go to the neighbouring town, where he would find an itinerant musician who was his match in virtue and

* Quem ambitiosum vidimus aliquando contentum, adeptis dignitatibus, ad alias non anhelare? Ep. 341.

† Quem eorum, qui avaritiæ serviunt, aut amatores sunt voluptatum, seu vanas hominum sectantur laudes? Nonne et ipsorum insatiabili desideria arguunt nos negligentiæ, et tepiditatis? Pudeat certe spiritualium nos bonorum minus cupidos inveniri.

‡ Vitæ Patrum. Vita S. Paphnutii.

holiness. Astounded at the tidings, he seized his staff, hurried to the town to seek for the wandering minstrel, and having found him in a place of public resort in the midst of a crowd of idlers, he drew him apart and asked him the history of his life. The man replied, "I am a great sinner; I was a robber by profession, and now by my playing and singing I go about amusing folks, and thus manage to gain an honest livelihood." The Saint, however, questioning him more closely, discovered that the man had performed many acts of heroic virtue at different periods of his life; as for instance, his band had one day carried off a virgin consecrated to God, and were on the point of robbing her not only of her property, but also of the priceless treasure of her virginity, when he, rushing to the rescue, took her from them by main force and brought her back to her home, unspotted and inviolate. On another occasion, having in a lonely place met with a woman of very prepossessing appearance, who was filling the solitude with her wailings and lamentations, he asked her the cause of her grief. She told him she was driven to despair, because her husband and children had been imprisoned for debt, and that she was destitute of means to restore them to liberty and to support herself. On hearing her story, the robber not only refrained from insulting her modesty, but taking her to his cave, gave her food and sent her away with three hundred crowns, wherewith she might release her family from prison and herself from so many sorrows. It would be hard to describe what ardent desires of perfection this narrative enkindled in the breast of Paphnutius: he blushed for himself, seeing that he had been so many long years in the desert and had not yet been able to equal a common strolling-player in holiness. He set himself a higher and more arduous task of virtue; multiplied his fasts, lengthened his night vigils; gave himself with redoubled earnestness to prayer, to the purification of his conscience, in short, to the whole business of his spiritual progress. After some years spent in this manner, God was pleased to awaken anew within him the former desire to know whether he had his equal in virtue, and he began to beseech the Lord once more with a thousand entreaties. This time he received an answer in the interior of his soul; he w. s

to go to the neighbouring town where he would find a married man, his fellow in merit. He went to test the truth of what he had heard, and found a secular who for thirty years had kept conjugal chastity with his partner, and was wholly employed in deeds of charity to the poor and to strangers, besides practising many other virtues. This example of such rare virtue inflamed the servant of God with still greater desires, and led him to devote himself to more arduous exercises of perfection than had hitherto been his wont; he could not but deem his former endeavours to have been of no worth, since they had barely enabled him to reach to the level of one who was tramelled with worldly cares.* After another interval of some years, he again addressed to God the same prayer, and he received the same answer, to wit, that his virtue did not surpass that of a certain merchant who had come to visit him in his cell; and this enkindled in him desires still more earnest, and stimulated him to works of yet greater perfection. At length, being made perfect in every virtue, the Angel of the Lord appeared to him once more, accompanied by the prophets and the blessed spirits, by whom his soul was received and borne to the heavenly mansions and set upon a throne befitting his great sanctity. In a word, in order to raise Paphnutius to a sublime degree of perfection, God took no other means but that of exciting in him fresh desires, fresh yearnings after that perfection wherewith He had purposed to endow him. Hence the Director may properly use with his penitents the saying of St. Antony, who, as St. Athanasius relates, was ever sounding in the ears of his disciples, "to look upon themselves as beginners, never to relax their efforts, but always to continue to aim at making greater spiritual progress."† But as the means employed by God in the case of St. Paphnutius are extraordinary, nor may we make use of them (as without a very special inspiration the prayer he so frequently made to God were

* Seipsum denuo majoribus exercitiis dedit, exiguos priores reputans labores, quibus conferri poterat ei, qui sæculi videbatur actibus implicatus.

† Hoc sit primum cunctis in commune mandatum, nullum in arrepti propositi vigore lacessere, sed quasi incipientem augere semper debere quod cœperit. In Vitâ S. Antonii.

unlawful), I will now point out the ordinary and usual means which may enable us to keep alive within ourselves these holy desires, and ever to add to them a new intensity.

CHAPTER V.

THE MEANS OF MAINTAINING AND INCREASING OUR DESIRES OF PERFECTION.

69. THE first means is the frequent use of holy meditations. In my meditations, says the Royal Prophet, my heart is fired with a holy ardour, which spurs me on to virtue and perfection.* And in truth, it is in meditation that we must light up in our souls that holy fire which makes our heart burn with desire to go forward in the path of our spiritual advancement; for in meditation we learn how worthy God is of our love, the greatness of his favour and of that loving kindness which is of such efficacy in exciting our hearts to make him a return of love, our duty of following Jesus Christ, and of becoming more and more perfect every day of our lives by putting on His likeness. In meditation the beauty of virtue shines forth and charms the soul; the deformity of sin, the unloveliness of our imperfections, are there discovered and inspire us with loathing. In meditation we realise what are the good things in store for us in our heavenly home, what the punishments which threaten us in the bottomless pit; so that by the dread of punishment and hope of reward the desire of holy virtue is kindled in the soul. Meditation, in a word, is the crucible wherein the human heart loses its hardness, is made pliant, is heated, and, as it were, set on fire with holy aspirations. I cannot now dwell upon this point, as I shall shortly have to treat of meditations at full length in a special Article. I shall content myself with relating a story, which is only one among many thousands that I might bring to prove the truth of what I have said.† An unhappy priest was

* In meditatione meâ exardescet ignis.

† P. Rosignoli, Notiz. memor. degli Eserc. cap v. sec. 1.

confined in the prison of Castile; this depraved man had apostatised from two religious orders, he had profaned the Sacraments, had committed many other sacrileges, was guilty of innumerable crimes, and deserving of death a thousand times. God's mercy did not disdain to knock at the door of this abandoned heart, and struck so loud, that the wretched man was at length aroused from his deadly torpor, and aware of the ruin that threatened him. He immediately called for a Father of the Society to which I belong, and having discovered to him the hapless state of his soul, he besought him for advice, remedy and assistance. Considering the great and many enormities into which this miserable man had fallen, the Father judged that meditation on the fundamental maxims of the Faith was the most efficacious means of bringing him back to the path of salvation—and even of perfection—from which he had gradually strayed. And that these truths might more surely avail to penetrate into his heart, he set him to meditate on them in the order wherein they are so fitly developed by St. Ignatius in the book of his "Exercises." Nor was the good Religious disappointed; for by the very first meditations which the poor man made, he was moved to deep repentance; he began to fast frequently, and even thrice in the week, on bread and water; he wore a rough hair-shirt next to his skin, and tied a galling rope round his neck; each night for the space of half an hour he disciplined himself to blood; in his general confession, which he made with floods of tears, he protested that, however cruel and ignominious were the death to which human justice might consign him, it would be much less than what his crimes deserved, and that consequently he had made up his mind not to use any means to escape from it. But his fervour increased ever as he continued his meditations, and, not content with his own amendment, he began to preach to his fellow-prisoners; and though in the beginning he had to put up with many taunts and insults, yet by the power of his words and by the alms which he gave out of what was supplied him for his own maintenance and needs, he succeeded in converting many, in improving others, and even in inducing some to aim at a certain degree of perfection by the practice of meditation, the frequentation of the Sacraments, and

applying themselves to do penance for their sins. The prison that had hitherto been like a den of wild beasts, was now changed into a monastery of penitents, in which blasphemy, cursing, and obscene words were no longer heard, but in their stead, hymns, rosaries, litanies, and other devout prayers. The fame of this extraordinary conversion was noised abroad, and soon reached the ears of the judges, who resolved to save the criminal from the death he had so richly deserved. But he put in as many petitions that he might be sent to the gallows, and that the sentence of death passed upon him might be executed, as any other would have done to escape this fate. The judges, however, tempering justice with mercy, condemned him to the galleys, to give him an opportunity of repeating in another sphere the wonders he had wrought in the prison. This sentence, however, could not be carried into effect, for, having been seized with a violent fever, he was soon brought to his last hour, and peaceably breathed forth his soul in the liveliest sentiments of sorrow for sin and trust in God's mercy. Now, on this I remark, that if the meditation of Christian truths availed so powerfully to change a heart steeped in guilt of the very deepest dye, and to lead from a state of damnation to a perfect life, it will assuredly have power to keep wary, watchful, and fervent, all such as are truly desirous of perfection and really striving after its attainment. Of this there cannot be two opinions. A Director may therefore take for granted, that the regular and frequent use of meditation is the most effectual means of maintaining and increasing the desire of perfection in his penitents.

70. Second means. Ever to renew the resolve to tend to perfection as though we had just begun. Such resolves and renewals of purpose keep the soul on the alert, and hinder it from slumbering or wearying in the course of perfection. Such was the advice the Apostle gave to those neophytes of the early Church, who, from the sacrilegious worship of idols, had, by holy Baptism, been brought to the true worship of Jesus Christ: *Be renewed in the spirit of your mind.** But how, it may be asked, is this renewal of spirit to be brought about by the mind? By ever reiterating with mind and heart the resolution to tend to perfec-

* Renovamini spiritu mentis vestræ. Ad Ephes. iv. 23.

tion, as if a beginning had not been yet made, nor hand put to so sublime an endeavour; and especially by descending into the detail of the virtues and penitential exercises which each one may know to be required for his advancement, purposing to practise them courageously. Thus was holy David accustomed to act, as we may learn from himself.* Whatever advance this holy prophet had made towards the heights of perfection, still, as if he had been a mere beginner, he frequently said to himself, "Now I will begin to serve God; from this day forth I mean to devote myself wholly to His service." Such too was the last lesson St. Antony gave his monks while they were standing around his dying bed, as we learn from St. Athanasius: "My children, I am going the way my fathers have gone before me; God is calling me to Him, and I myself yearn to be amid the heavenly choirs. Beloved of my heart (for thus was he wont to call his spiritual offspring), waste not in a moment the labours you have undergone during so many years; and, lest you may, imagine to yourselves that each day of your religious life is the first in which you enter upon the career of perfection, so that by this renewed purpose your wills may be strengthened to go forward ever and to make progress in virtue."† The Director will do well to take this lesson for himself, and to make use of it with his penitents if he wish to see them advancing in perfection, and especially if he would (to use the words of the holy founder of the monastic state) prevent them from losing in a short time the fruit of their past labours.

71. The third means. Never to dwell in thought on the good we have done, but rather to look forward to the virtues in which we are still wanting. This means has been inculcated by St. Paul, both by word and example: *Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended,* to have reached the goal of my perfection,

* Et dixi, nunc cœpi. Ps. lxxvi. 11.

† Filioli, secundum eloquia scripturarum, patrum ingredior viam. Jam enim Dominus me invitat: jam cupio videre cœlestia. Sed vos, O viscera mea, admoneo, ne tanti temporis laborem repente perdatis. Hodie vos religiosum stadium arripuisse arbitremini, ut cœpta voluntatis fortitudo succrescat. In Vitâ S. Anton.

but *forgetting those things which are behind*, the good I have already wrought, *and reaching forth unto those things which are before* with all the strength of my soul, *I press forward toward the goal*, to the good I have still to do, and I continue to run in the course of perfection, that so I may gain the prize which God, by calling me to Himself, has appointed unto me. And he continues: *Let us therefore, as many as are perfect be of the same mind.** Saint John Chrysostom has given a development of this text which is exactly suited to our discourse. He says that "to dwell on the good we have done begets two evil consequences: first, it fosters a vain self-complacency which will insensibly make us proud and presumptuous; and next, it makes us slothful for good, because, casting glances of self-approval upon our good deeds of past times, we remain satisfied and contented with ourselves, and cease to aim at further progress."† Whence he infers that "if the Apostle, after numberless perils of death, after toils and sufferings, great enough to kill him many times over, cast his former works behind his back without bestowing a thought on them, much rather should we, who are so inferior to him in virtue and merit, do the same."‡

72. Having, then, forgotten the past, continues the holy Doctor, we should imitate the example of St. Paul, and look forward even as they that run a race, who stay not to measure the distance they have traversed, but hurry on towards the goal, and with thought of it take fresh courage. The more so because the remembrance of the good we have done is of no use whatever, unless this good be completed and made perfect by the fulfilment of what remains to be done.§

* Fratres, ego non arbitror comprehendisse. Unum autem, quæ retro sunt, obliviscens, ad ea, quæ sunt priora, extendens me ipsum, ad destinatum persequor, ad bravium supernæ vocationis Dei in Christo Jesu. Quicumque ergo perfecti sumus, hoc sentiamus. Phil. iii. 13–14.

† Nam duo mala parit: et segniores facit, et in arrogantiam extollit. Hom. 11, in Epist. ad Philippenses.

‡ Si Paulus post mille mortes, post tanta pericula istud arbitratus est de se; multo magis nos. . . . . Obliviscenda ergo et nobis recte facta, et a tergo relinquenda.

§ Etenim et qui currit, non reputat quantum spatii confecerit, sed quantum adhuc desit. Et nos non quantum virtutis impleverimus reputemus, sed quan-

73. Not content with this very apt exposition of these words of St. Paul, he further adds most pertinent reflections in order to imprint more deeply in our souls this spiritual aphorism which has so great might to urge us forward in the path of perfection. "Observe then," says the Saint, "the Apostle does not say, I value not, I set no store by my past good works—I never speak of them—but, I have wholly forgotten them; for this forgetfulness it is that makes us diligent and earnest in well-doing, and imparts to our souls a certain alacrity and readiness to do what yet remains to be done in order to attain to perfection."* He further observes, on the expression, *reaching forth unto those things which are before*, that by it the Apostle describes the singular efforts he made to mount ever to a higher and more eminent degree of perfection. For as he that runs a race, in his eagerness to reach the winning post, stretches forward his whole body, feet and face and arms, in order to hasten his course; so did this Saint, with a continually increasing eagerness of desire, stretch forth his spirit, and make it tend to a still greater perfection; thus did he run with great alacrity and fervour in the way of the Lord: thus too must we also run if we seriously aspire to perfection.† Finally, let us reflect that this forgetfulness of the good we have done, this stretching forward with all the power of our soul to the good that remains to be done, is not only, according to the Apostle, a means of perfection, but—as we pointed out in the preceding Chapter—it is itself perfection; for St. Paul winds up by saying, that whoever is perfect adopts this course,‡ and in this sense precisely St. Bernard explains the text;

tum adhuc supersit. Quid enim nos juverit quod confectum est, si quod deest, adjectum non fuerit?

* Et non dixit, non reputans, neque memorans; sed obliviscens; nam ita demum, diligentes et seduli reddimur, quando omnem animi promptitudinem alacritatem ad id quod adhuc superest assequendum collegerimus et reparaverimus, quando præteritæ oblivioni mandaverimus.

† Ad ea vero, quæ sunt priora, extendens meipsum. Enitens enim is est, qui pedes quamquam currentes, reliquo corpore antevertere studens, seipsum ad ea quæ a fronte sunt extendit, et manus quoque protendit, ut etiam amplius quidquam ultra cursum efficiat. Hoc vero fit ex multâ animi alacritate, ex multo fervore. Ita oportet currentem currere, cum tanto studio, cum tantâ alacritate, non pigre.

‡ Quicumque ergo perfecti sumus, hoc sentiamus

"Whosoever then would be a perfect Christian, let him utterly forget all the good he has done in time past, and let him keep the eyes of his mind and the desire of his soul ever fixed on the good which yet remains to be done in the time to come."*

74. The fourth means. To think often of present defects and past sins. I have just said, that to keep alive the desire of perfection we should not allow our thoughts to dwell on the good we have accomplished. Now I go farther and say, that we ought to keep before our mind the evil which we have committed and do daily commit, as also the virtues in which we are wanting; because such thoughts as these fill us with holy confusion, and stir up in our hearts a longing for the virtues of which we feel the need, with the desire of mortifying whatever we have discovered to be faulty within us; and these thoughts drive and spur us onward to perfection. Let us listen to St. Augustine, speaking upon this subject: "My Brethren, if you would make rapid progress, examine yourselves without deceit and without flattery, for there is no one within you to put you to the blush; God is there, it is true, but then humility and a lowly opinion of yourself are pleasing to Him. Be ever displeased at being what you are, if you wish to come to be what you are not.†" That is to say, if you would acquire the perfection you do not possess, you must never be self-satisfied, but you must keep in mind your shortcomings, your sins, your mistakes, your want of virtue, the rebellion of your passions, and you must entertain a kind of discontent with yourself; let this however, be unobtrusive, tranquil, peaceful, and full of confidence in God: for this it is which will rouse the feelings of your heart, and light up therein the desire of improvement, and of coming to be what as yet you are not.‡ And immediately after he adds: If in any one point, through imperfect self-knowledge, you feel well

* In quo manifeste, apostolo docente, declaratur, quia perfecta eorum, quæ retro sunt, oblivio, et perfecta in anteriora extensio, ipsa est hominis justi in hâc vitâ perfectio. Lib. De Vitâ Solit.

† Proficite, fratres mei, discutite vos semper sine dolo, sine adulatione, sine palpitatione. Non enim est aliquis intus tecum cui erubescas, et jactes te. Est ibi, sed cui placet humilitas. . . . Semper tibi displiceat quod es, si vis pervenire ad id quod nondum es. De Verbis Apost. Ser. 15.

‡ Semper tibi displiceat quod es, si vis pervenire ad id quod non es.

satisfied with yourself, rest assured that in that very thing there will be a halt in your journey, and no kind of anxiety to ascend to higher perfection.* If, however, at any time you induce yourself to think the perfection attained to be enough, you are a lost man.† And why? Because (and I have proved it just now) you cannot stand still in that stage of perfection. You will have, whether you like it or not, to turn back and to move down, step by step and unconsciously, to your final ruin. March then, the Saint says, ever forward, ever be adding something to what you already possess, ever profit more and more; pause not in the path of perfection, turn not aside, retrace not your steps.‡ And to bring this about, no other means are at your disposal than to keep always alive, and constantly enlarge your desires of greater perfection, according to the method set forth in this Chapter.

CHAPTER VI.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS TO DIRECTORS TOUCHING THE FIRST SECOND AND THIRD CHAPTERS OF THIS ARTICLE.

75. FIRST suggestion. In starting souls upon the way of perfection, the Director must proceed with prudence method and sagacity, or he will not attain his object. We have said that the first thing for a Director to do when he wishes to lead a soul to perfection, is to awaken the desire and purpose of taking up the matter in earnest. We have moreover suggested motives well calculated to kindle such longing, for this is unquestionably the foundation from which our building must take its rise. He should reflect, however, that not every person is in condition to be thus wrought upon. He who is still entangled in grievous sin, or still held prisoner in the bonds of depraved affections and sinful

* Nam ubi tibi placuisti, ibi remansisti.

† Si autem dixeris: Sufficit, periisti.

‡ Semper adde, semper ambula, semper profice. Noli in viâ remanere, noli retro redire, noli deviare.

occasions, is assuredly not ready to be spoken to about perfection. In such a state of things the first necessity is to heal the grievous wounds of sin, and restore the soul to a life of grace. This done, the next step will be to think of establishing it in perfect health; precisely as physicians do, whose first care always is to free their patients from some dangerous malady, and then, and not before, think of removing the traces of disease, and strengthening the constitution. Imitate Jesus Christ, Who (says St. Ambrose) like a kind and wise physician, first heals the festering wounds of our soul, cleansing it from all impurity and curing the blindness caused by other grievous sins, and after that by little and little leading it up the steep ascent of perfection.* But in the case of one who has lived for a long time in innocence, but who having unfortunately come to stain his soul with mortal guilt, has returned to God and feels sincerely penitent, a Director should strive to guide him to higher perfection, and should be careful to use the means best suited in that special instance to help him gently onward.

76. Second suggestion. In the case supposed, where the soul has shaken itself free from the shackles of mortal sin, and is in a fit state to move forward and gain ground in the practice of Christian virtue, let the Director carefully take note, whether this soul feels itself urged by God to higher perfection, or, well content to remain in a state of grace, has no thought of anything beyond. If he discover in it the movement of the Holy Spirit, Who with His inspirations is urging it to a life of virtue, he has only to fan with his counsels these first sparks in order to light up those vivid desires of perfection which may in their own good time produce, as they often have done, the flames of ardent charity. If the soul remain languid and benumbed, with no anxiety except to keep from grievous sin, then the Director should endeavour by some means or other, by some little

* Primum unusquisque sanandus est, ut paulatim, virtutibus procedentibus, ascendere possit ad montem. Et ideo quemque in inferioribus sanat; hoc est a libidine revocat; injuriam cæcitatis avertit; ad vulnera nostra descendit, ut usu quodam, et copiâ suæ naturæ comparticipes nos faciat esse regni cœlestis. Hom. in c. 6, Lucæ, lib. v.

expedient, to rouse it to better things; because it may be that God, in thus holding Himself aloof, wishes to employ His minister to awaken holy desires in that soul. To many men, a general confession, made with deep contrition and strong purpose of amendment, has been the beginning of a high perfection. Blessed Angela of Foligno, for instance, recounts in her autobiography, that only after a general confession did she consecrate herself unreservedly to God; we cannot, therefore, refuse to believe that the sublime sanctity which she in after life attained, found in this its starting-point. I have myself known several persons who, having long led a dissolute life, were so completely changed after making a general confession, that they not only passed at a bound to a state of great perfection, but were even admitted to experience some degrees of very high contemplation. To others the Spiritual Exercises have proved the starting-point of sanctity, as in the case of St. Charles Borromeo, St. Francis Borgia, and many more. In others perfection has taken its rise from the reading of spiritual books, as with St. Ignatius of Loyola, and St. John Colombino; or from listening devoutly to preaching, as with St. Nicholas of Tolentino. In the case of others, Almighty God has attached His blessing to some rebuke of a priest in the confessional, uttered in pure zeal for the glory of God to lead a soul to the life of perfection. So Blessed Giacinta Marescotti, by the timely reprimand of a zealous confessor, was transformed from a vain and imperfect nun into a fervent religious. So when the Lady Sancia Curriglia, Maid of Honour to the Empress Isabella, who moved along rustling in robes of silk, spreading perfume as she went, chanced to hear that apostolic man, Father John of Avila, observe that scents of that kind were the odours of hell, and those splendid dresses the nets in which souls were dragged thither, she gave herself up to rigorous penance, and became a living model of all perfection. The more usual course, however, and the one which, to my mind, should be most generally adopted by a Director, is that which I have mentioned in the preceding Chapter, and which I mean to treat soon at greater length; the practice, namely, of holy meditation. The reason of this is manifest. Desires of perfection come from God, and although a Director

should make use of various ways and means to stimulate them in the hearts of his penitents, still it is quite certain that to God alone belongs the power of infusing them into our hearts by His inward lights and holy inspirations. Now let us ask, What is the most natural and sure manner of receiving the heavenly lights and spiritual impulses which entice the soul to works of virtue? Who cannot answer from experience? Surely, meditation on the maxims of our faith; for the soul retired apart, brought face to face with God, and wholly fixed on the thought of these high truths, discerns the vanity of earthly things, the priceless value of eternal things, the importance of salvation; realises the enormity of sin; comes to know how Almighty God deserves to be loved and served. The knowledge thus acquired very naturally awakens in the soul the desire of conforming in practice to that which it has already acknowledged in principle; or, to say the same in other words, desires of true perfection are enkindled in the soul. Among the other expedients, then, to which the Director should have recourse in bringing his penitents to reform their lives, let him never omit this; for if he can only prevail upon them to take up, and faithfully carry on, the practice of meditation, he will without fail behold them advanced from day to day, not in desires alone of greater perfection, but in deeds also.

77. Third suggestion. When a Director has a mind to introduce to the spiritual life one of his penitents of either sex, living in the world, who may seem sufficiently disposed, I should scarcely advise him to broach at once the subject of perfection, because such language is apt to frighten people living in the world; whether it be that they fancy that Christian perfection appertains not to them, but is the peculiar aim of monks and recluses, as I have before remarked, or that they picture it to their minds as a very difficult, dismal, perplexing and heart-corroding matter. And, therefore, were he to deal with such persons too abruptly, he would succeed only in convincing them of his indiscretion, and would set them against him. I would advise him rather to go more cautiously and practically to work, and, without ever naming perfection, to introduce them skilfully to an acquaintance therewith, by engaging them to perform some

of the holy practices which I have recommended above. Then, as soon as he sees that Almighty God is awakening in them holy thoughts, and is beginning, with the aid of pious affections, to kindle desires of a more virtuous life, he may throw off all disguise, and lay before them the duty which they, no less than others, have of tending to a perfection suitable to their state, and of taking proper means to excite the desire of it in their hearts. And to keep this conviction alive in his own mind, the Director should ponder the teaching of St. Gregory in his thirty-sixth Homily, who there tells us that the joys of earth have this peculiarity, that seen from afar they are pleasing to the eye, and make men wish to win them; but on closer inspection and actual trial they prove insipid, and cause weariness and disgust, while spiritual things, on the contrary, when seen in the distance, appear repulsive, but when narrowly scrutinised, and submitted to proof, are found sweet to the taste, and awaken desire of possessing them.* The reason, he says, why those cannot desire or love spiritual things who have not put them to the proof of experiment, is simply this, that as things of the spirit do not fall under the perception of the senses, he who has not made trial of them can know nothing of the sweetness which they possess.† Let then a Director do his best to enable his penitents, by the means above set forth, to gain some foretaste of how sweet is God, and to feel some relish for virtue, and some desire to gain possession of it; after which he may freely and openly urge them on to the acquirement of that perfection which is suited to their state.

78. Fourth suggestion. The Director should take notice that perfection is not the same in all, and that consequently he should not force all to travel by the same way of life. The perfection of a man living in the world is one thing, the perfection of a Religious is another. One kind of perfection should be looked for from a

* Hoc distare, fratres carissimi, inter delicias corporis et cordis solet, quod corporales deliciæ, cum non habentur, grave in se desiderium accendunt: cum vero habitæ eduntur, comedentem protinus in fastidium per satietatem vertunt. At contra, spirituales deliciæ, cum non habentur, in fastidio sunt; cum vero habentur, in desiderio; tantoque amplius a comedente esuriuntur quanto ab esuriente amplius comeduntur. In Evang.

† Et ideo non habitæ amari non possunt, quia earum sapor ignoratur. Ibid.

maiden, who has only herself to attend to; another kind from a married woman, who is in duty bound to take care of her family, and to live in harmony with her husband. And even in Religious Orders, all do not take the same route to perfection. If, for example, a Carthusian wanted to convert souls by preaching, he would not be working out the perfection of his Institute, which prescribes a purely contemplative life. Or if a Jesuit wanted to remain always shut up in his own room, without ever seeing any human being, he would not carry out the perfection of his rule, which prescribes a life of combined contemplation and action. A Director must therefore use caution, and induce his disciples, when they first undertake to live a devout life, to fix their eyes steadily on the peculiar perfection belonging to their state, and to guide their desires to that alone, that they may not stray at the first start, and that it may not be said with truth of them, that they hurried onward with zeal and energy, but not in the right direction.* And this is the more important, because wrong principles, taken up at first starting, root themselves deeply in the mind, and it is well-nigh impossible to eradicate them. Hence also arises the duty of a Confessor to retrench all vague and unprofitable desires, even though they be fixed upon things that are holy; the desire, for example, which a beginner might form of converting whole nations, of bringing idolaters to the light of faith, with other designs of a like nature, quite out of keeping with his present position; for such desires encumber the heart and dislodge the more useful desire of what is needed for present progress. The Director should remember what St. Francis of Sales says on this subject: "I cannot for a moment approve the conduct of one who, whilst he is bound by one course of duty, or by one line of vocation, occupies himself with desires of some other kind of life which lies outside his sphere of action, or who adopts practices incompatible with his present state; for this kind of behaviour only wastes the affections of the heart, making it feeble in the performance of the duties that are of obligation."† All this must be understood, however, of fixed and enduring desires which take

* Bene currunt, sed extra viam. † Devout Life, p. 3, chap. 33.

possession of the heart, and not of the holy desires which just come and go, and cannot do any possible harm.

79. Fifth suggestion. When desires of perfection begin to awake in the soul of the penitent, the Director must take good care not to exact too much, as though he were anxious to make a saint in a single day: else, if he be eager for too much, he will run the risk of losing all. He would do well to consider that for acquiring the perfection belonging to any state of life, there is no need of employing all means that are known; it is quite enough to select some. This is what F. Suarez teaches upon the authority of St. Thomas.* His proof is taken from the example of the Apostles; for they did not all of them embrace the counsel of not receiving their support from the Churches: St. Paul alone did this. The same theologian argues also from reason, for the evangelical counsels are not all adapted for all states of life; voluntary poverty, which is the virtue of Religious, belongs not to persons living in the world, who are only obliged to make a good use of their wealth; and the chastity which is expected in monks and nuns, cannot be looked for in the married life. Besides, it is evident that works of supererogation ought to be different in beginners, proficients, and the perfect; because the work to be done should bear proportion to the strength of the workman, and he that has greater strength should of course produce greater results. The Director must in the next place reflect, that those particular counsels which are well suited to his penitent's case, and which he ought to put in practice, cannot, nevertheless, be performed with the same completeness and precision at the commencement of the undertaking as in its after stages: because perfection glides into the soul by little and little. A man grows in virtue as the body grows, by imperceptible degrees; or as a tree grows in the field—though no one sees it growing. We cannot perceive the increase day by day, though there is every day some increase; but after a certain length of time, we notice that progress has been made. The Director, then, must be well on his guard,

* Ad perfectionem animi obtinendam non est necessarium omnia consilia integre servare; sed aliqua interdum sufficient. De Relig., tom. iii., lib. i., cap. 5, n. 2; S. Thom. Opusc. xix., cap. 2.

and especially at first, in dealing with penitents of this class, for fear that, instead of fanning into a flame, he may only extinguish altogether those first little sparks of holy desire which have been lighted up in their hearts by Almighty God.

80. St. Teresa relates of herself that when God began to confer great supernatural favours upon her, she desired to lay open—as she really did lay open—her whole soul to some great master of the spiritual life, able to give her good and safe guidance. And although the Director upon whom she chanced was a saintly and experienced man, yet he did not act very discreetly in her case, neglecting to accommodate his advice to the strength of spirit she then possessed. The Saint tells us that if she had been forced to live under his sole direction she would never have made any progress, for his imprudent zeal served only to dishearten her. These are her words :—"At last I discovered that the means which he recommended were not such as I needed to set me right, but were better calculated for a soul more advanced in perfection. . . . . And certainly, if I had been obliged to consult and confer with him alone, my soul would never have made any progress, as far as I can judge ; for the distress which I felt on seeing that I had not done, and as it seemed to me could not do, what he set me to do, was quite enough to make me lose all hope of attaining to perfect abandonment."* If, then, a Director is anxious to avoid mistakes in the direction of his penitents, let him never exact anything which is beyond that degree of spiritual strength which is actually communicated to them by Almighty God ; for in reality it is out of their power, morally speaking, to do more than this. To lay upon a beast of burthen a heavier load than it can bear, only serves to weaken it when it tries to carry the overpowering weight ; in like manner, to prescribe to penitents practices and mortifications which exceed the strength supplied by grace, will have no other result than to break down their courage.

* Life, chap. 40.

CHAPTER VII.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS TOUCHING THE FOURTH AND FIFTH CHAPTERS OF THIS ARTICLE.

81. FIRST suggestion. From what has been said in the fourth Chapter, the Director will have learned that the chief object of his zealous endeavours must be to prevent his disciples relenting in their willingness and desire to become perfect, and to make them ever cherish and always keep active their purpose of tending to greater perfection; for when this begins to fail, they will fall back step by step into their former torpid state. But to help him to apply a remedy to so great an evil, if ever it come to exist, I will furnish some tests by which he may discover whether the penitent, after having once been fervent and eager for self-improvement, is beginning to grow tepid. I will set down, I say, some tests; for were I to attempt to give them all, a more lengthy treatise would have to be written.

82. The first symptom will show itself to the Director clearly and unmistakably in spiritual duties; for as soon as ever the penitent's purpose begins to grow feeble, he will begin to neglect his spiritual exercises, meditation, prayer, spiritual reading, &c.; or at all events he will cut them short for slight reasons: or he will go through them with great want of attention and interest, and with no real will—more from routine, in fact, or human respect, than from a desire duly to profit by them. Examinations of conscience, which he made before with so much compunction, he will either omit at seasons, or at least make in a slovenly way, and with no beneficial result, and will have recourse to the Sacraments with a kind of reluctance, less frequently, and without drawing fruit from them. The inspirations of God and the reproaches of conscience he will meet with irresolution, and will put off always to some other time the mending what is wrong or the doing what is good.

83. Let the Director, therefore, know well how to distinguish between the censurable lukewarmness which a person brings

upon himself, and that usful dryness of soul which God often sends to spiritual persons, either to prove or to purify them. In aridity and tepidity alike, it is true, every sensible affection and all feeling and relish for spiritual things disappear; but then there is this difference, that in aridity, when the sensible affection ceases, the will never flags, and is even more steady than before in fulfilling every duty; whilst in tepidity the will goes along with the feelings, and is careless and indifferent about spiritual duties and virtuous actions; so that whilst aridity carries no fault with it, tepidity is attended by a great crowd of imperfections and venial sins. All this comes out clearly in the use of prayer and meditation. It is an undoubted fact that in aridity, no less than in tepidity, there is a subtraction of that clear light (as it were), and almost visible working of divine grace; and in the one and the other equally the soul remains parched and dry. But then the sufferer from mere aridity does not give up or curtail his usual prayer; he does not allow distractions to master him, but he keeps strict watch over his thoughts to turn them back to God; and if he cannot elicit acts of love with emotion and from the heart, he makes them—dryly it is true and without unction—by the force of his will. But he who is in the state of tepidity acts far otherwise; for finding no relish in his prayers, he either quits them altogether or shortens their length, surrenders himself to distractions or dismisses them feebly, and appears in God's presence with his will quite as unmoved as his heart.

84. The second symptom will be discovered by the Director in exterior duties: while previously his penitent was fond of retirement, now he will be found quite changed in this respect. The Director will see him spending himself upon external things, always seeking in amusement and much talking and unprofitable curiosity, that consolation from without, which the poor man can no longer find in the inner life of piety. Where before he was careful to practise mortification of the senses, the Confessor will now with grief behold him allowing his eyes to wander without restraint, indulging in idle conversation and finding fault with everybody. He will see him beginning to treat himself over-kindly in matters of food, sleep, and delicate living, and readily excusing himself from

his customary penances; for it seems to him now that a day's fasting will bring on a decline, and a discipline nothing less than death itself. He will perceive too well that, instead of the spiritual man which the penitent once was, he is fast changing into the carnal man.

85. The third symptom will be discerned by the Director when he happens to converse with the penitent; he will find no longer that frankness and candour which used to disclose to him every movement, good or bad, that went on within; no longer that submissiveness with which reproof was received; no longer that obedience with which every particle of advice given was fulfilled. He will discover a certain mutiny of the passions, no longer blameless, but voluntary, since it springs from a culpable adhesion of the will. He will find a certain self-complacency and vanity, which is ordinarily the main-spring of these lapses into coldness. And perhaps—indeed, very probably—he will be conscious that the penitent is already beginning to cast satisfied and even covetous glances at the pleasures and the possessions of the world, which once he had forsaken with so much generosity.

86. Second suggestion. If a Director perceive in the penitent all or any of these symptoms, he may know for certain that every desire of perfection has grown cold in his breast. He must endeavour, nevertheless, to rescue the person quickly from his state of torpor, by setting before him such motives as may have power to make the smothered fire once more burn brightly in his heart. The first motive should be, I think, the one I have given above —namely, that if anyone continue thus lukewarm in his spiritual duties and in the practice of virtue, he must go backward, and ever backward, whether he wish it or not; and must lose in a short time what it took him a long time to acquire. And the Director should push him hard with the comparison which St. Gregory the Great makes when he likens our soul to a little boat in the midstream of a rapid river, which, if every effort be not put forth to make headway against the force of the water, can never stand still in the middle, but is perforce carried back by the violence of the current. And thus if the soul, says the Saint, does not exert itself

to advance in virtue, resisting bravely the impetus of its own bad propensities and the shock of the devil's attacks, it can never stand still on the voyage of perfection, but will have to go back in spite of itself, and to lose all the way it had made in the whole course of its spiritual voyage.*

87. The second motive may be one which we have only glanced at—namely, that if the lukewarm person do not rouse himself from his tepidity, and strive to burn with desire of improving himself, not only will he lose all that he has earned so painfully, but by little and little he will come to a fearful fall, and will plunge headlong into a very abyss of mortal sins; so that when the servants of God, says Cassian, meet with deplorable falls, the blame is not due to the present circumstances which gave them the last push, but rather to those previous habits of negligence, which, by weakening the hold of virtue in the soul, and lending energy to the passions and vicious inclinations of nature, rendered the miserable men unable to keep their footing.† How true this is, the wretched Euprepianus knows full well, whose ruin St. Theodore the Studite bewails.‡ He lived for many years in a monastery, and in that sacred retreat he was a model of every religious virtue—fervent in prayer, unwearied in mortification, prompt in obedience, most exact in the observance of rule. Twice he was imprisoned for the faith, and stood firm in spite of chains and dungeons. Twice he was severely scourged by the idolaters, and he bore patiently rude stripes, suffered cruel torments, shed his blood freely for the love of Jesus. Who, I pray, would not have been ready to predict final perseverance after a life so fervent, a virtue so unflinching? Who would not have thought

* Si enim, quod videtur gerendum sollicitâ intentione non crescit, etiam quod fuerat bene gestum decrescit. In hoc quippe mundo humana anima, quasi more navis est contra ictum fluminis conscendentis; uno in loco nequaquam stare permittitur: quia ad ima relabitur, nisi ad summa conetur. Pastoral. p. iii., cap. 35.

† Lapsus quis jam nequaquam subitaneâ ruinâ corruisse credendus est; sed pravæ institutionis deceptus exordio, aut per longam mentis incuriam, paulatim, virtute animi decidente, et per hoc sensim vitiis increscentibus, casu miserabili concidisse. Ante contritionem enim præcedit injuria, et ante ruinam mala cogitatio. Collat. vi., cap. 17.

‡ Serm. ix. Cath.

that he could see in the future the halo of the brightest sanctity? And yet Euprepianus fell with infamy.* Who, then, had power to cast to the ground this pillar-of Holy Church which had stood unmoved the rudest shocks of cruel persecution? It was nothing but tepidity. *Dormitans cecidit*—"he slumbered and fell;" *in his sleep he fell.* The desire of perfection had begun to grow drowsy; he had begun to slacken in his application to prayer, in his practice of virtue; he had begun, in a word, to go back, and, backsliding step by step, he fell at last headlong into the gulf of mortal sin; and, what is sadder yet, ended with a bad death. Nor is there cause for wonder here; for, as by a gradual loosening of the foundations, says Cassian (already quoted), or by a continual though gentle dripping of water, the fall of a noble building is sometimes brought about, so a loosening of the supports of the soul and a constant dripping of faults and wilful deficiencies casts to the ground the stateliest structures of Christian perfection. Hence, *Let him who stands take heed lest he fall.* If the penitent, grown tepid, has not so fallen as yet, the Director should terrify him with the picture of so awful a danger, to make him place himself once more upon the road of perfection, by calling back to life the desires which were at the gasp of death.

88. The third motive, and the most efficacious of all, will be to make him consider well that a soul which from a state of perfection has sunk into tepidity, and from that has passed to mortal sin, finds it hard to regain the position it has forfeited. St. Paul says that the restoration of such souls is morally impossible.† Cassian is of opinion that a thorough worldling will be converted, and mount to the loftiest heights of perfection, more easily than a monk or any one else who has fallen from fervour into tepidity.‡ And he gives for the reason of this that a sinner

* Et tamen dormitans cecidit.

† Impossibile enim est, eos qui semel sunt illuminati, gustaverunt etiam donum cœleste, et participes facti sunt Spiritûs Sancti . . . . . et prolapsi sunt, rursus renovari ad pœnitentiam. Ad Hebr., cap. vi., 4 et 6.

‡ Facilius ad salutarem conversionem, ac perfectionis fastigium carnalis quis, hoc est sæcularis, vel gentilis accedit, quam is, qui professus monachus, nec tamen vitam perfectionis arripiens, secundum regulam disciplinæ ab illo semel spiritualis igne fervoris discessit. Collat. iv., cap. 9.

at the sight of his wickedness is more easily moved to compunction, more readily humbles himself and submits to the guidance of another, and so has less difficulty in passing on from repentance to self-amendment, and in making in the sequel rapid strides in the path of the spiritual life. On the other hand, one who from the pursuit of perfection falls into lukewarmness can never bring himself to see that he is blind and wretched, and in great need of guidance, for he thinks himself an enlightened man; and hence his difficulty in retrieving his lost position.* He concludes by bringing experience to attest the undoubted teaching which he has laid down, and observes that every day we see icy and numbed hearts warming gradually to fervour, but never one tepid soul becoming fervent.† While thinking of tepidity, those words of God in the Apocalypse fall upon our ears. "It were well for thee," wrote the Apostle St. John to the Bishop of Laodicea by order of the Almighty—"it were well for thee if thou wert *either cold or hot* in the service of God; *but because thou art lukewarm I will begin to vomit thee out of My mouth.*"‡ These words, so say the Saints, tell us how God forsakes those souls that cool in their purpose and desire of perfection; for as men loathe the food they have vomited, so Almighty God loathes the lukewarm soul which He has cast out of His divine mouth. St. Ignatius once appeared to a devout client of his, and said, with good reason, that could the Blessed in Heaven feel grief of heart, they would clothe themselves in mourning apparel and carry in their countenances every sign of sorrow, to testify the anguish they feel whenever a soul that has been fervent grows cool in the service of God;§ and this, no doubt, on account of the danger to which such a soul, beyond all others, exposes itself of being

* In eo factus sæculari deterior, quod nec miserum se, nec cæcum, nec indigere monitis alicujus, aut institutione cognoscit. Ibid.

† Postremo quid diutius immoramur in his, quæ nobis experimento satis comperta sunt ac probata? Frequenter enim vidimus de frigidis atque carnalibus, id est de sæcularibus atque paganis, ad spiritualem pervenisse fervorem; de tepidis atque animalibus omnino non vidimus. Ibid.

‡ Utinam frigidus esses, aut calidus. Sed quia tepidus es, et nec frigidus, nec calidus, incipiam te evomere ex ore meo. Cap. iii., 15 et 16.

§ Nolarci, Vita, c. 19.

forsaken by God and of rushing to its destruction. Nevertheless, if a Director see that his penitent, moved by reasons so strong and convincing, enters into himself, and, beginning to repent of his lukewarmness, has registered his resolve to return to his former state, let him use all endeavour to rekindle in his soul the desire of perfection, and to establish him once again in all his ancient fervour, by employing the means which I am now going to propose.

89. Third suggestion. When a furnace has been extinguished, it is rekindled by the same fire by which it was first lighted. So too with desires of perfection: the same means must be employed to revive them which served first to set them on fire. Let the penitent who has grown lukewarm betake himself again to prayer; let him have recourse once more to the Sacraments, to examination of conscience and spiritual reading: let him do this, however, not with presumption nor by routine, but in the right spirit, and with an earnest desire of improvement. Above all, let him commend himself to God with repeated and heartfelt prayer, beseeching Him to strengthen Him anew with His grace, and to shed on his soul once more the light of heaven. And the Director meanwhile must try to give him fresh courage, by assuring him that all those reflections so full of terror, which we have recorded above, have place only with those tepid souls who are content to rest undisturbed in their wretched state, but were never meant to apply to those who, after having for a time relaxed their efforts, are anxious to give themselves once again to the faithful, fervent service of Almighty God. Nay, such souls are welcomed by the Lord with an especial love as His old friends, and as familiar attendants at His court. He must keep on repeating to the penitent those beautiful words of St. Bernard: "Let us arise, I pray you, my children, from this melancholy state; let us put to rights our poor souls, disordered in all her acts, laid waste in all her powers; let us take courage anew; let us drive far from us the tepidity that is working our ruin."* He should say to him with the same Saint, that if the thought of the

* Exsurgamus, obsecro, quicumque hujusmodi simus (hoc est, tepidi), resarciamus animam, spiritum recolligamus, abjicientes perniciosam tepiditatem. Serm. vi. de Ascens.

serious losses and grievous risks mentioned above, is powerless to induce him to make up his mind, he should at least do so if only to set himself free from so many scruples and so much remorse of conscience, so many agitating doubts and straits of the soul, which he will have to suffer as long as he chooses to remain in a state of tepidity.* If all this, however, do not suffice to re-awaken dormant desires of good, nothing remains for the Director but to pray for him.

90. Fourth suggestion. The Director will meet with some souls who never lose sight of the duty of progress, but are struggling to make constant advance in the path of perfection; who yet are never satisfied with themselves: they fancy that, instead of gaining ground, they are falling back, that they are one mass of faults and failings from head to foot. In cases of this kind—they are anything but rare—the Director must be on his guard, and act with due discrimination, if he wish to avoid mistakes. If these souls derive from their convictions a sincere humility (by which I mean a kind of self-abasement, interior, quiet, and tranquil) together with a certain low opinion, or even, it may be, a downright depreciation of self, and, instead of at any time losing their confidence in God, only increase it at the sight of their wretchedness, they are in an excellent frame of mind; for, just as a good deal of self-approbation is the immediate cause of vanity, pride, and neglect of good works, so, the being dissatisfied with self—in the manner just described—makes the soul pant with eager desire of that perfection, the want of which is found to be so grievous. And it was this which made St. Bernard say: "It is a contrivance of God's goodness, that the more we advance, the less we think ourselves advancing."†

91. But if the result of this dissatisfaction with self be diffidence, cowardice, dismay, and loss of heart, then the poor soul is in a bad way; unable, I mean, to make progress; for discourage-

* Etsi non quia periculosa est, et Deo solet vomitum provocare, certe quia molestissima, plena miseriæ et doloris, et inferno plane proxima umbra mortis jure censetur. Ibid.

† Divina solet pietas ordinare, ut quanto quis plus profecerit, minus se reputet profecisse. De Quatuor Modis Orandi.

ment is a tight bond which binds fast the spirit, keeps it captive, holding it back, cramping and stopping its onward movement. A Director in this case should help his disciple to draw from the sense of his failings and miseries, not depression of spirits and loss of energy, but honest humility full of trust in God. Let such a one recognise in God's presence what he really is, let him acknowledge his shortcomings and take shame to himself, but without fretting: and let him think as hopefully of God as he thinks poorly of himself: nay, from his very inefficiency and feebleness, let him gain fresh motives for surrendering himself to God with the fullest confidence. Let him do what good he can with God's grace, and from the succour he receives let him gather new courage and look for yet larger graces from above, according to the teaching of St. Gregory the Great.*

ARTICLE III.

The second means to acquire Christian perfection is the choice of a good Director.

CHAPTER I.

THE NECESSITY OF A GUIDE IN ORDER TO WALK WITH SECURITY ON THE ROAD TO PERFECTION, SHOWN FROM SCRIPTURE AND THE HOLY FATHERS.

92. "As soon as you have defeated the efforts and put down the opposition of your sworn enemy the devil, and have made up your mind to serve God with the perfection He calls for, set yourself with all your heart," says St. Basil, "and with all the

* Ex magnâ Conditoris nostri dispensatione agitur, ut per minima, quæ perspicimus, sperare majora debeamus. Dialog. lib. i., cap. 9, in fine.

prudence at your command, to the work of choosing a Spiritual Father who may be to you a trusty guide and an able leader in all your undertakings."* Thus, according to the teaching of this holy Doctor, next after the first desires of perfection and the first resolves to acquire it, the thing most needful to be done in order to secure substantial progress in the spiritual life, is without doubt the choice of a faithful guide. Let us then examine what the Fathers of the Church and the Holy Scriptures teach us of the urgency and extent of this necessity.

93. St. Gregory the Great, speaking of the Abbot Honoratus, a man of humble birth, but eminent in sanctity, and the founder at Fondi of a monastery of two hundred monks, whom by his holy example and wise training he raised to high perfection, says that this Abbot had no other guide to perfection than God Himself.† And he adds, that "there are some persons, to whom, in default of all external direction, God deigns to be Himself a teacher, leading them to perfection by the inward guidance of His grace."‡ He adduces the instances of St. John the Baptist and of Moses, who had no earthly master to instruct them; and who yet, under the guidance of God, sometimes in His own Person, sometimes by the ministry of an Angel, rose rapidly to the height of perfection.§ It would seem that St. Augustine acknowledges the same, when, commenting on the Psalms, he says that there are some saints whose spiritual training depends, not upon any mortal man, but upon God alone.‖ There cannot, accordingly, be any doubt that

* Simul ac in primo luctationis istius congressu adversarium superaveris . . . . summâ vigilantiâ acerrimâque in omnes partes animi circumspectione operam dato, ut aliquem tibi virum invenias, quem in omnibus deinceps delectæ tibi vitæ studiis certissimum ducem sequaris. De Renunt. sive Abdicatione.

† Nequaquam hunc fuisse alicujus discipulum audivi: sed lege non constringitur Spiritûs Sancti, donum. Dialog. lib. i., cap. 1.

‡ Sed tamen sunt nonnulli, qui ita per magisterium Spiritûs intrinsecus docentur, ut etsi eis exterius humani magisterii disciplina desit, Magistri intimi censura non desit. Ibid.

§ Sic quippe Joannes Baptista magistrum habuisse non legitur . . . . Sic Moyses in eremo edoctus mandatum ab angelo didicit, quod per hominem non cognovit. Ibid.

‖ Cœlum cœli Domino, qui erexit et sublimavit quorumdam sanctorum mentes in tantum, ut nulli hominum, sed ipsi Deo suo dociles fierent. In Ps. cxiij.

the case absolutely may occur in which God Himself shall be pleased to be sole master and guide of some chosen soul.

94. St. Gregory the Great, after having laid down this doctrine, at once subjoins that these are "extraordinary cases, and which cannot form a precedent, lest it should come to pass that each one, conceiving himself to be under the inward guidance of the Holy Ghost, should think himself the scholar of God but the master of every one else."* And he says, in conclusion, that "this is not a matter for men to arrange, but for God alone: a thing to be admired indeed, honoured in some great saint, but not to be copied by us who are feeble and imperfect."† For "the order of God's usual providence requires that no man should make himself or allow others to set him up as a master, who has not previously been a scholar, and that no man should exact obedience who has never yielded it."‡

95. But because this is a very delicate matter, which, if not properly understood, may easily lead into serious mistakes, I shall have to show, at some little length, what are the circumstances which give a just right to expect special direction from God, and what, on the other hand, are the circumstances which make it impossible without presumption to expect so special and direct an intervention of the Most High, and consequently oblige us perforce to betake ourselves to His creatures, and trust to their guidance in spiritual matters. Hence, we must consider some of the many situations in which a person desirous of advancing in virtue may happen to be placed. If he be living where no one can be found to point out the path of perfection, and to give rules of conduct, I have not any kind of doubt that Almighty God will Himself act as his guide and teacher, and with inner lights and the movements of grace, will show such a one the road he must take to arrive at perfection, always supposing, of

* Quorum tamen libertas vitæ ab infimis in exemplum non est trahendas; ne dum se quisque similiter Sancto Spiritu impletum præsumit, discipulus hominis esse despiciat, et magister erroris fiat. S. Greg. Ubi sup.

† Sed hæc, ut prædiximus, infimis veneranda sunt, non imitanda. Ibid.

‡ Usus quidem rectæ conservationis est, ut præesse non audeat, qui subesse non didicit, nec obedientiam subjectis imperet, quam prælatis non novit exhibere. Ibid.

course, that he fail not to demand this help of God; for the Almighty is bound to make up for the want when the services of His minister cannot be secured. And such was precisely the case in the instances cited by Pope Gregory: it was so in the case of St. John the Baptist, who, dwelling in the wilderness far away from commerce with men, never had the chance of listening to our Saviour's discourses, or of being enlightened by His heavenly teaching; so, too, was it in the case of Moses, when living all alone in the desert, taken up with the care of his flocks; and so also with the holy Abbot Honoratus himself, who, having been born in a country place, and brought up among simple peasant folk, had no master of the spiritual life to give him lessons in perfection. But if he who is eager for perfection finds his lot cast in some city, or other place where there is no lack of priests, confessors, learned men, and ghostly fathers, who can give him counsel and direction in all his interior and exterior actions; in such a case I maintain, that for a person to pretend to have Almighty God Himself for a guide, whilst he rejects the guidance of God's ministers, and to allege that the Almighty is speaking to his heart, he the while refusing to address himself to the ears of him who holds God's place, would be an act of great presumption; it would not only forfeit for such a one all hope of God's special guidance, but even be the cause of his being permitted, in punishment of so great effrontery, to fall into grievous errors, as others have been already permitted to fall. We shall see more of this, however, in the course of the present Article.

96. I will illustrate what I have said by several facts taken from Holy Scripture. God speaks to Moses from the midst of the Burning Bush, calling him by his name, *Moses, Moses!* and shortly after He makes Himself known for the Great God Himself; the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob.* God speaks in the dead of night, and in the deep stillness of sleep, to the youthful Samuel, calling him thrice by name, *Samuel, Samuel, Samuel!* but He does not show Himself to Him, or make Himself known. Now, why, pray, does God deal so differently with

* Ego sum Deus patris tui, Deus Abraham, Deus Isaac, Deus Jacob. Exod. c. iii., 4. 6.

these two great prophets? Why does He, when speaking to the one, reveal Himself as the God of Israel, and when speaking to the other, refrain from discovering Himself in the same manner; so that, although Samuel heard the voice, he did not know who had aroused him from sleep and summoned him to his presence? The reason is most clear. Moses was in the wilderness, and had no one there to commune with about the meaning of God's utterance: to God, accordingly, it belonged to make good the deficiency by Himself disclosing Himself: Samuel was living in the Temple, and there he had the High Priest Heli ready at hand to give him useful counsel; it was but fitting that he should apply to the Priest to learn who had called him and broken short his rest. And from Heli in fact did Samuel receive the light to understand that Almighty God had been speaking to him, and by him he was advised, in case a fourth summons came, to answer, *Speak* then, *O Lord*, finish what Thou hast to say, *for Thy servant heareth.** From this it is easy to gather that—as I said a little while since—Almighty God sometimes, in default of priests, works all alone in our souls, and by Himself alone gives them light and instruction. But when His ministers are at hand, He wills us to have recourse to them, and He chooses to enlighten and direct us by their agency. This is exactly the reflection which Cassian makes upon what occurred to Samuel: "Almighty God did not vouchsafe Himself to instruct the child Samuel, but He would have him once and again, and for a third time, recur to the aged Heli; that first, by such submission to the High Priest, and dependence upon him, trial might be made of his fitness for the prophetic mission to which he had already been destined: and secondly, to give to the young an example of the deference which they owe to the advice of their spiritual superiors in all their undertakings.†

97. Another instance, no less convincing, we find in the Acts

* Loquere Domine, quia audit servus tuus. II. Reg., iij., 9.

† Puerum Samuelem judicio Domini prælectum, suâ nollet per semetipsum divini eloquii disciplinâ Dominus erudire, sed recurrere semel et iterum, pateretur ad senem . . . ut scilicet et illius qui ad divinum ministerium vocabatur, probaretur humilitas, et junioribus forma subjectionis hujus proponeretur exemplo. Collat. ii., cap. 14.

of the Apostles in the person of the Doctor of the Gentiles.* Jesus Christ appears to St. Paul as, in his headlong fury, he is drawing near to the gates of Damascus, vowing vengeance against the Christians, with his mind full of dungeons and chains, of deaths, and stripes and blood. Our Blessed Lord pours a flood of light around the future Apostle, and with the thunder of His voice strikes him down outstretched upon the earth, all stunned and trembling with fear. St. Paul, when he felt the stroke from heaven, surrendered on the spot, owned himself conquered, and, changed from a raging lion into a gentle lamb, threw himself into the arms of Him Whom he had till that moment so cruelly persecuted, resolved now to do His will in all things: *Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?* Yet Almighty God, notwithstanding that He sees him so well disposed, does not disclose His designs. And why? Because there is in Damascus a priest, Ananias by name, to whom he can make application. *Go to him*, says our Lord, *and learn from his lips what I will have you to do.*† "And could not Jesus Christ then," Cassian interposes here, "in His own person instruct St. Paul, as He had already single-handed over-mastered him by the power of His grace? He could have done so, of course; but He chose rather to show us, by this example, that we must not presume upon gaining from God that direction which we are able to procure from His ministers."‡ Nor is this all. I will say more, and though what I add may sound strange, it will be found true. St. Paul received the Gospel by divine revelation: he began to preach to the nations with the zeal of an Apostle: then he paused in his preaching, and went to lay his doctrine before St. Peter. But of what was the Apostle afraid, you will ask; since he had his doctrine from the fountain-head of all truth, that is, by revelation from God's own mouth, from which no lying word can come? I answer, that there lurked a scruple in his heart,

* Cap. ix. 6.

† Vade ad Ananiam et ibi dicetur tibi quid te oporteat facere.

‡ Mittit itaque et hunc ad seniorem, eumque illius potius doctrinâ quam suâ censet institui, ne scilicet, quod recte gestum fuisset in Paulo, posteris malum præsumptionis præberet exemplum. Dum unusquisque sibimet persuaderet, simili modo se quoque debere Dei solius magisterio, atque doctrinâ, potius quam seniorum institutione formari. Collat. ij., cap. 15.

in that, although there were Apostles still living on the earth and able to pronounce upon his revelations and his teaching, he had never yet submitted the one and the other to their judgment. This was his sole anxiety. Nor did he rest till he had been to Jerusalem to confer with St. Peter, face to face, about the truths which he was continually announcing to the nations, and to submit them to his judgment and approval; and this, although these truths had been imparted to him by Almighty God.* So true it is that, in the affairs of our soul, God would have us to cherish ever a spirit of candid and submissive dependence upon His ministers, whenever we can avail ourselves of their assistance.

98. But since this truth, however abundantly it may be proved, is very sparingly acted upon by many who make profession of leading spiritual lives, I am anxious to put it in a still clearer light by the help of another fact related by Cassian, whom I have just quoted.† Two monks, who lived in a wild and lonely spot beyond the Thebaid, left their monastery, and without provisions of any kind, plunged into those vast solitudes, resolved to touch no food till God should Himself furnish it. While they, already wasted with hunger, were wandering on through these great deserts, they met a man, who, when he saw them so pale feeble and emaciated, offered them some loaves of bread to restore them in their great need. One of the two monks accepted some and thus kept himself alive; the other, persisting in his rash hope of being fed by God's own hand, refused the offer; and since the food which he foolishly expected from Heaven never arrived, starvation soon brought him to the end of his days and he died miserably. Now, God for many years provided St. Paul, the first hermit, with bread, employing the service of a raven to carry him his daily pittance, and by the hands of Angels sent food to other servants of His, as we find recounted in histories of the Church; why then, I ask, did He leave this poor monk without any support in his most dire need? The reason is obvious. St. Paul, the first hermit—and the same holds good of the rest—living in the desert, to which God's direct inspiration had led him, utterly

* Ne forte in vacuum currerem, aut cucurrissem. Ad Galat., ij., 2.
† Collat. ii., cap. 3.

severed from the intercourse of men, had no chance of procuring the necessaries of life. It was, therefore, very fitting that God should come to his assistance, and miraculously provide with food a hermit who was himself unable to procure any. On the other hand, the monk above alluded to was in no want of food in his monastery, which he forsook in his headstrong folly; and even then might have accepted bread from the hands of the person who proffered it so kindly. Because he chose to insist upon forcing God Himself to give what it was in his own power to procure from men, therefore was he righteously left to grow weaker and weaker, and at length to die wretchedly. What we have been saying of the material food which nourishes our bodies, is equally true of the spiritual food which sustains our souls, and gives them vigorous health to run forward to perfection; the parallel is complete. If any who are called to perfection cannot, in the given circumstances of time and place, obtain from some man the guidance requisite, then God will in person come to the aid of such, or will supply the needed direction by the ministry of the Angels whom He has appointed to guard us. But if the assistance of Confessors and other experienced persons can be had, and any person cares not to avail himself of it, by opening his whole conscience to them, expecting in his folly to receive from the Lord by unaccustomed ways that direction which he is at no pains to procure through the ordinary channel, he will be left by God to grow faint in the way of perfection, and perhaps to lose the life of grace, just as that unhappy monk was left to grow faint in the desert, and die the death of the body. Hence we may conclude by saying with Cassian, that "whoso does not care to have perfection by the way of admonition teaching, and guidance, is safe not to have it from God."*

99. St. Jerome, in the same spirit, frequently offers this piece of advice to those whom he instructs in his letters: To choose a good Director, who may act as their guide on the road of perfection. He bids Rusticus "seek the companionship of spiritual

* Unde manifestissime comprobatur, nec a Domino quidem viam perfectionis promereri, qui habens unde valeat erudiri, doctrinam seniorum, vel instituta c[illegible]mpserit. Ibid.

men, and place himself under their direction, and by no means presume to be his own master in perfection, or to journey without some one to show him the way along roads he has never yet traversed."* In a letter to Demetrias, he tells her, that she must "put herself under the obedience of tried and perfect men, to learn from them what are the ways of that spiritual life, the rules of which are given in Holy Writ; and, above all, not to take self-confidence for leader and guide upon this journey; for it would be impossible to make a worse choice."† And the holy Doctor is on this point quite of one mind with St. Bernard, who says, that "if any one makes himself his own master in the spiritual life, he makes himself scholar to a fool."‡ In fact, that man is really a fool who is capable of acting in so silly a manner. I believe however that, what St. Vincent Ferrer says upon this particular, will strike still more forcibly all who are in earnest about their own advancement in spirit. The Saint asserts boldly that "whoever can have the aid of a Director, and despises it, will not be assisted by Jesus Christ with His divine grace, without which we can do nothing; because obedience is the royal road which leads most securely to the top of that ladder, the symbol of perfection, on which, as the patriarch Jacob saw in his vision, God was leaning."§ Such are the expressions which the Saints and Holy Scripture use to give us to understand the necessity under which we are all placed of choosing some guide to conduct us in safety along the way of perfection. But to imprint these sentiments more deeply on the mind and heart of the pious reader, I proceed to give some of the proofs upon which their assertions rest.

* Mihi placet, ut habeas sanctorum contubernium; ne ipse te doceas, ne absque ductore ingrediaris viam, quam numquam ingressus es.

† Bonum est igitur obedire majoribus, parere perfectis, et post regulas Scripturarum vitæ suæ tramitem ab aliis discere, nec præceptore uti pessimo, scilicet præsumptione suâ.

‡ Qui se sibi magistrum constituit, stulto se discipulum subdit. Epist. 87.

§ Christus, sine quo nihil possumus, numquam suam gratiam ministrabit illi, qui cum habeat qui eum ducat in viâ perfectionis, negligit ductum ejus. Obedientia via est regia, quæ homines inoffenso pede ducit ad summum scalæ, in qua Dominus apparet innixus. In Tract. De Vitâ Spirit.

CHAPTER II.

REASONS SHOWING THE NECESSITY OF A GUIDE, THAT WE MAY WALK SAFELY IN THE ROAD TO PERFECTION.

100. THE first reason which proves this necessity is the evident fact that no art or science or accomplishment on earth is acquired without a master. I am not here speaking of the more sublime sciences—philosophy, for instance, or mathematics, or theology—which no one of course need hope to make his own without the help of a skilful tutor. Nor yet do I rest my observations upon the higher kinds of art—painting, for example, or sculpture, or architecture—in which no one can promise himself success without following the rules of an expert teacher. I confine my remarks to the more mechanical arts—tilling the fields, common masonry, working in wood, iron, copper, and other metals; for be these handicrafts as mean, abject, and inglorious as you will, yet, for all that, they cannot be learned without the instruction and example of some proficient in the art. Now, if the need of a master be so much felt in these external arts, which are concerned with visible, tangible objects, and present no great difficulty in their attainment, how much more needful must be the help of a master of the spiritual life, for the attainment of Christian perfection, which is so exalted sublime and arduous, which we cannot see with our eyes or touch with our hands, but which the mind alone can reach, and this only when purified and enlightened by the rays of God's grace! Here we have in question, not a paltry manufacture, but our highest good or our greatest loss; an eternity of happiness or an eternity of woe hangs, perhaps, upon the balance. All must allow that the parity is striking, the reasoning unanswerable; and to add to its innate force the sanction of authority, I may as well say that it is none of mine, for I have taken it from Cassian.*

* Cum omnes artes, et disciplinæ humano ingenio repertæ, et quæ nihil amplius, quam vitæ hujus commodis prosunt, licet manu palpari queant, et oculis pervideri; recte tamen a quoquam sine instituentis doctrinâ nequeant

101. St. Jerome goes much farther, and says that not only men can learn no art without a master to help them, but even brute beasts, though they have no power of reason or speech, cannot go through their labours without some kind of master; for even these have a chief and guide, who sets them the example in their own special line of activity. Sheep follow their leader, bees their queen, and some wild fowl are seen to place their captain in front, and follow him in two converging lines.* And then the Saint concludes with an exhortation to Rusticus to live no longer as his own master, but to withdraw into some monastery; not so much thereby to quit a treacherous world, with its pomp and fascination, as to set in good order the whole tenor of his conduct within and without, by rendering obedience to some prudent superior.†

102. This grand maxim of the spiritual life was admirably understood by Paul surnamed the Simple. After he had determined in his heart to give himself up altogether to perfection, he went to the desert, and there having made his way to St. Antony's monastery, he threw himself at the holy Abbot's feet, and then put himself at his disposal, to be by him ruled and directed in all things. The Saint, to test the postulant's sincerity, at once bade him continue in prayer before the door of the cell till such time as he should come out. Paul knelt down, and began to pray; and, in defiance of sun and wind and inclement weather, there he stayed in persevering prayer for a whole day and a whole

comprehendi: quam ineptum est credere, hanc solam (nempe artem perfectionis) non egere doctore, quæ et invisibilis et occulta est; et quæ non nisi corde purissimo, per cujus oculos videtur error, non temporale damnum, nec quod facile reparetur, sed animæ perditionem parit, mortemque perpetuam! Collat., ij. c. 11.

* Nulla ars absque magisterio discitur. Etiam muta animalia et ferarum greges, ductores sequuntur suos. In apibus principes sunt; grues unam sequuntur ordine litterato. Epist. ad Rustic.

† Per hæc omnia ad illud tendit oratio, ut doceam te non tuo arbitrio dimittendum; sed vivere debere in monasterio sub unius disciplinâ patris. . . . non facias quod vis: comedas quod juberis: vestiare quod acceperis: operis tui pensum persolvas: subjiciaris cui non vis, lassus ad stratum venias, ambulansque dormites: et nondum expleto somno, surgere compellaris: dicas psalmos in eo ordine, in quo non dulcedo vocis, sed mentis affectus quæritur, etc.

night. Then St. Antony, knowing that the youth had as truly abandoned himself to his care as a child to its mother's arms, purposing to admit no other motive of conduct than the commands his superior might furnish, built for him a little cell three miles distant, and imposed on him a rule of life austere to the last degree in all that concerned the body, and minutely exact and uncompromising in the interior government of the soul. And perceiving that the young man allowed himself to be ruled in everything and paid exact obedience to every order, the Saint was glad at heart.* Not quite satisfied, however, with this probation, the holy Abbot put the Novice to still greater trials, and prescribed to him the most unreasonable actions. He ordered him to make clothes and then unstitch them again; he caused him to plait baskets and then told him to undo the work immediately; he forced him to spend the whole day in fetching water from a well and pouring it uselessly on the ground. The disciple did all that was told him with a holy simplicity, allowing himself, like a child, to be sent hither and thither by his saintly Director with unreasoning obedience. I must add to this what happened at one of the Conferences which St. Antony used to hold with his monks. Whilst the others were submitting sensible questions for discussion, the simple-minded Paul childishly asked if Jesus Christ had lived before the Prophets. The holy Abbot felt ashamed at such a question, and told the other gently to hold his tongue and to leave the pious assembly. Paul went out, and observed so rigorous a silence, that for a long time he did not speak a single word. To be brief: by this full and perfect submission to the Spiritual Father whom, from the first, he had taken for his Director and guide in the way of the spirit, Paul attained such a height of sanctity, that he wrought more numerous and amazing miracles than Antony himself, though he, too, was a great wonder-worker. Indeed, this holy Abbot used himself to hold up Paul as an example to others, and to tell them that the surest way of speedily arriving at perfection was to cease to be their own masters, and, renouncing all will of their own, as

* Ipsum frequentius visitans congratulabatur, deprehendens eum in his, quæ sibi tradita fuerant, totâ intentione et solicitudine permanentem.

Paul had done, to place themselves in all things under the direction of another.*

103. The second reason which makes it advisable to secure a guide is, to defend ourselves against the wiles and illusions of the devil, which are almost sure to ensnare the man who is journeying along the road to heaven without the guardianship and government of a Spiritual Father. "There is no vice," says Cassian, "which makes it so easy for the devil to drag down to death and eternal ruin, souls consecrated to God, as this desire to shape our own course independently, and to dispense with the counsels of enlightened men."† He gives melancholy instances of some who, having reached high perfection, afterwards desiring to order their lives as their own fancy led them, came to fall headlong into abysses of crime, from which at times they never rose. So it befell with the monk Hero, who lived fifty years in the desert in great austerity, and then, by the cunning of the devil, was thrown down from the height of perfection into the depths of ruin; and all because the wretched man had got into the habit of following the dictates of his own judgment, to the exclusion of all advice from without.‡ The enemy of man persuaded him, that if he were to throw himself into a deep well, he would, by the power of God, escape unhurt: and so, without another thought, he forthwith made the rash attempt. Almighty God, in reward, perhaps, of the holy life he had led for so many years, so disposed that they were able to draw him out of the well, if not unhurt, at all events alive, that he might have time to repent of so gross an error. But since the unhappy man had grown old in the habit of following his own judgment without consulting others, the time which God gave him for repentance served only to strengthen him in his wrong principles; for, during the three days that he lived after his fall,

* Ex cujus exemplo docebat beatus Antonius, quod si quis vellet velociter ad perfectionem venire, non sibi ipse fieret magister, nec propriis voluntatibus obediret, etiamsi rectum videatur esse quod velit. In Vitis Patrum. De Paulo Simplici.

† Nullo namque alio vitio tam præcipitem diabolus monachum pertrahit, ac perducit ad mortem, quam cum eum neglectis consiliis seniorum, suo judicio persuaserit, definitionique confidere. Collat. ij. cap. 11.

‡ Illusione diabolicâ a summis ad ima dejectum. Cap. 5.

no one was able to convince him that he had been imposed upon by the demon, nor to bring him to express sorrow for his heinous sin; so that the unfortunate man died giving little, if any, hope of his salvation. The same author tells us of another case very similar.* The devil persuaded another monk, that if he killed his son, whom he had living with him in the monastery, he would be equal to Abraham in merit and sanctity. He had (as usual, without seeking advice of any one) already sharpened his knife; he had the cords prepared, and was nerving himself for the unholy sacrifice, and he would assuredly have carried out his purpose, had not the son, who was the wiser of the two, by a timely flight, saved himself from impending death, and his father from the commission of a dreadful crime. After narrating these and other lamentable falls, Cassian recounts the course recommended by the Abbot Moses to those who would escape these and a thousand other like snares, which our arch-enemy is constantly spreading for our feet. He says that the wholesome prescription of that great master of the spiritual life was simply this, to take a Director, and to lay one's whole conscience open to him with sincere humility, conforming to his advice in all things. He adds that a sure sign of this real humility will be, if the penitent shall disclose, not only all he does or means to do, but also every suggestion that passes in his mind, and shall then yield to him an unreserved submission.†

104. Very much to our present purpose is the illustration used by St. Ignatius in his Spiritual Exercises to unmask the trickery by which the devil tries to overreach the unwary. When, says the Saint, the evil spirit wishes to deceive us, he adopts the same kind of tactics as a young profligate who is trying to seduce a married woman or maiden, that he may have his way with her. He fears nothing so much, he shrinks from nothing so much, as

* Cap. 7.

† Cujus humilitatis non fictæ hæc erit prima probatio, si universa non solum quæ agenda sunt, sed etiam quæ cogitantur, seniorum reserventur examini, ut nihil quis suo judicio credens, illorum in omnibus definitionibus acquiescat: et quidquid bonum, vel malum debeat judicare, eorum traditione cognoscat. Cap. 10.

the thought of disclosure being made to husband, or father, of the words and secret messages which pass between himself and the intended victim. If he cannot prevent this, he despairs of success. Just so the demon, when he would fain seduce a soul, uses every artifice to prevent the unveiling of his sly schemes to a Confessor or spiritual adviser; for so surely as his hidden devices are brought to light, the traitor knows full well that his deep-laid plot must fail.* The only way, then, to avoid being deluded by the machinations of the bad angel, is to choose a Director, and act towards him with all due candour.

105. The third reason which should lead us to this mode of conduct, is the thought of the difficulty which lies in the way of knowing and practising solid virtue, if a skilful Director be not at hand to satisfy our doubts. Virtue is found midway between two extremes. If there be the slightest encroachment upon the confines of the extremes of excess or defect, immediately some admixture of vice begins. Now, it is surely difficult to discern this middle course, both by reason of self-love—so deeply rooted in our souls, and so prompt to flatter us to our ruin—and by reason of our passions which darken the mind and make us see dimly, and which by their hidden movements are for ever urging us into excesses and extravagance. One and all of us have need of a good guide who can with practised eye himself discern and point out to us the proper way, and make us keep to it in defiance of our evil inclinations. Add to this the great danger of travelling without a guide along the road of perfection; because the very same virtuous actions, which if rightly performed have power to lead us towards perfection, may also take us to the brink of the

* Inimicus noster morem insequitur cujuspiam amatoris qui puellam honestorum parentum filiam, vel uxorem viri alicujus probi volens seducere, summopere procurat, ut verba et consilia sua occulta sint; nihilque formidat magis, ac ægre fert, quam si puella patri suo, vel uxor marito ea patefaciat; cum sciat hoc pacto de votis, et conatibus suis actum esse. Ad eundem modum obnixe satagit diabolus, ut anima quam circumvenire cupit, ac perdere, fraudulentas suggestiones teneat secretas. Indignatur vero et gravissime cruciatur, si cui vel confessionem audienti, vel spirituali homini molimina sua detegantur, a quibus ita excidere se funditus intelligit. In Exerc. Spirit. Reg. 3. De Discern. Spirit.

precipice. How many men have lost themselves by indiscreet fervour! How many have been stranded on the shoals of spiritual dryness, and instead of advancing have turned back to their former ways, and many of them even to a more abandoned life! To how many have even spiritual consolations, God's very choicest gifts, but proved a stumbling-block to cast them down! To how many have even fasting, watching, or bodily chastisement, practised unwisely and without direction, been only a great hindrance to that very perfection, as an aid to which these austerities were employed! St. Jerome bears witness that he had known spiritual persons of both sexes who had lost all sense and judgment, so as not to know what to do or say, and when to speak or be silent, purely in consequence of the excessive abstinence and penance which they practised without advice. So that these wretched people, having lost all sense, were no longer good either for this world or the next.* On this account the holy Doctor, after having in the passage lately quoted, laid upon Rusticus an injunction to place himself under the management and direction of some superior, and not to think of entering on a journey, knowing nothing of the road, unless accompanied by some one able to show him the way, immediately adds the reason: to the end that you may not come to commit some extravagance, or fall into some fatal error: to the end that you may not hurry over too many stages at once, or loiter behind unduly on the road of perfection: to the end that you may not by over-exertion exhaust your strength, and be unable to continue your course, or on the other hand take things too leisurely, and not get over half the distance.† These are precisely the evils which we have enumerated as menacing those who apply themselves to a life of piety and perfection without caring for the guidance of a spiritual

* Novi ego in utroque sexu, per nimiam abstinentiam, cerebri sanitatem fuisse vexatam, præcipue in his, qui humectis, et frigidis habitavere cellulis, ita ut nescirent quid agerent, quâve se verterent, quid loqui, quid tacere deberent. Ep ad Demetr.

† Statim que inpartem alteram declinandum sit, et errori pateasi plusque vel minus ambules quam necesse est, ne currens lasseris, aut moram faciens obdormites. Epist. ad Rustic.

adviser. Our last conclusion, then, shall be that authority and reason conspire to dictate to all who aim at Christian perfection the necessity of choosing a good guide for their journey.

CHAPTER III.

WHAT GIFTS THE PERSON AIMING AT PERFECTION MUST LOOK FOR IN A DIRECTOR, IF HE WISH TO MAKE A GOOD CHOICE.

106. DIRECTORS might suppose that this Chapter—as indeed all the others in this Article—belongs not to them, but only to their clients. It would be a mistake to think this, for Directors themselves have need of direction, and though they be masters to regulate the lives of others, they must submit to be learners in the conduct of their own; for as no one can be judge in his own cause, so no one can regulate his own life. Moreover, when a Confessor, reading this Chapter, shall see noted down the qualifications which he ought to look for in his own Director, he will be learning at the same time what are the gifts with which he should be himself endowed, in order to exercise with proper fruit his sacred ministry of souls. Thus, very far from being of no use to him, the present Chapter will, I hope, be doubly serviceable.

197. When any one is anxious to choose a ghostly father to whom he may entrust the care of his soul, let him try to secure one who professes the three following qualifications which are essential to the good government of souls:—First, he must be learned; secondly, he must be virtuous; thirdly, he must have practical experience of spiritual things. A Director must be learned, in order to discern the ways of the Lord, and not be liable to think that all have to take the same path or to travel with equal speed: in order to be able to recognise the errors into which the souls of the faithful may be betrayed: in order to go straight to the cause and origin of the movements that are passing in the heart, and after thus thoroughly understanding

the various motions of the soul, to know how to give to each its proper tendency. Again, a Director must be virtuous, so that he may be zealous for the good of his penitents; for no one can ever care much for the perfection of others who is unconcerned for his own. And lastly, he must also be experienced, or he will not know how to apply to particular cases those general principles with which, supposing him to be sufficiently learned, he is already acquainted in theory. For there are some who are well versed in the principles of the spiritual life, but who are unskilled in applying them correctly in the particular cases brought before them. When such persons make a mistake in the practical application, they spoil all their work; just as it fares with a physician who knows the virtue of every medicine, and the character of every disease that can attack the human body, but yet makes some mistake in applying his science to the sick man under his care.

108. Now, this experience is gained in two ways: both by the personal practice of perfection, and by the work of directing the souls of others. When a Director is in earnest about his own sanctification, and, moreover, observes closely the traces of God's action on other souls engaged in the same task, he learns in practice what are the errors men commit, the false steps they take, the risks they run, the temptations they have to endure; and he has ready the means remedies and preservatives appropriate to each case as it comes. He knows too by long experience what inclinations come from nature, what are the suggestions of the bad spirit, and what motions are due to grace. So that he knows with a practical knowledge what movements are harmful and need restraint, what are perverse and to be rejected, and what are to be encouraged as full of profit.

109. These are the very three gifts to which St. Basil would have us attend in the choice of a good Director. No sooner has he given us the advice to place ourselves from the very first under the care of a trusty guide, than he goes on to mention the qualities which such a guide ought to possess; and he tells us: That the Director to whom we entrust ourselves should be well versed in Holy Scripture; and this is learning: That he should be full

of the love of God, forgiving of injuries, good to the poor, free from self-seeking, and from taking part in mere worldly business, pure in his life, gentle, unassuming, grave, not fickle; here we have virtue. He says that he ought to be ready to welcome and instruct all who have recourse to him, and to take nothing to heart so much as the honour of God; and this is the experience of which we spoke. It is gained by the practice of virtue and the government of souls.*

110. From the works of St. Teresa we learn more clearly still how important it is to have a Director endowed with these three qualities. Speaking of the learning which he ought to possess, the Saint says: "Always seek learned men as your advisers; you will then safely distinguish the true road that will lead you to perfection."† "However good and pious a man may seem to you to be, and may really be, God preserve you from following his guidance implicitly if he be wanting in learning."‡ But although the Saint considers learning so indispensable in matters of the spiritual life, she does not, for all that, think it alone sufficient to ensure good direction, and she would have it accompanied by a virtuous life. If Directors, she says, are not men of prayer, their learning will avail little;§ for many go astray by wishing to have the Spirit of God in their minds without trying to possess it in their hearts.‖ She desires, lastly, that to learning and goodness, experience should be joined; for this, in all practical life, is the true standard and rule of our actions. "There is also" (I am quoting her own words) "great need of a teacher who is a man of wide experience; for otherwise he might fall into grave mistakes, and undertake the guidance

* Qui ornatus virtutibus sit, cujus universæ totius vitæ actiones testimonio sint caritatem in eo erga Deum inesse: qui divinarum litterarum scientiam habeat, virum integrum, nec ulli distractioni indulgentem, ab avaritiâ abhorrentem; minime libenter gerendis se negotiis admiscentem; quietum, amantem Deum, egentium studiosum, minime iracundum, injuriarum immemorem, naturâ propensum ad eos docendos, qui ad ipsum accedant; quem gloria inanis non inflet, superbia non extollat, adulatio non frangat; severum atque constantem; cui denique nihil sit præstantius honore Dei. De Renunt. et Abdicat.

† Way of Perfection, chap. 37.

‡ Life, chap. 13.

§ Foundations, chap. 3.

‖ Life, chap. 13.

of a person whose character he does not at all understand, and whom he prevents from understanding himself."* Therefore, he who desires to make great and rapid progress in Christian perfection, must use his best endeavour to secure a guide endowed with these three qualities; and he may rest assured, as St. Basil says, that if he succeed in his search, he will be blessed, thrice blessed, before God and men: for, being the child of so worthy a Spiritual Father, he will at length come to inherit all his virtues.†

111. I remember reading, in connection with this subject,‡ that when a lady in Spain was being exorcised, in the lifetime of that great master of perfection, Father Louis de Ponte, the priest constrained the devil to declare what it was that most annoyed him, and what delivered the greatest number of souls from his tyranny. The demon shunned the subject, and used all sorts of evasions to avoid answering. The exorcist, determined to conquer such obstinacy, began to press the evil spirit hard with questions, and asked whether what displeased him most were preaching? When this question was put, the demon broke into a loud laugh, making merry over the vain and unfruitful style of preaching then in vogue. The priest then went on to ask if it were confession? The answer was a sign of contempt, to signify that many either made bad confessions, or, directly after their confession, return to wallow in the same mire. At length being forced, by the power of the exorcisms, to disclose what it was which he hated and dreaded most: "Woe to me!" he cried, "when a soul gets into the hands of that toothless and broken old man; I have lost my prey." The old man whom the devil so hated was Father de Ponte himself, the great Director of souls, who was wanting in no one of the three gifts of which I have been speaking. He had learning, as we see from the many well-known books which he published; he had holiness, as we gather from the history of his life, which presents to our admiration so many heroic examples of

* Way of Perfection, chap. 5.

† Si te vero tradideris virtutibus multis instructo, sine dubio omnium quæ in ipso bene fuerint, hæres remanebis, æque et apud Deum, et apud homines beatissimus judicaberis. S. Basil. ubi supra.

‡ Cattaneo, Massime Eterne, Lezione preparat Punto 4.

virtue; he had experience, as is proved by the number of souls whom he sanctified, among whom it is enough to mention Sister Mary Diaz, led by him to the loftiest heights of perfection, as we may learn in her life, which Da Ponte himself wrote whilst he was still her Director. And therefore it was that the devil was forced to confess, that as sure as a soul came into this old man's hands, it became entirely God's, and from that time forward no fiend had any part in it. Happy then, I repeat with St. Basil, is he who meets with such a guide, for he has found in him a treasure of virtue and all perfection.

112. But if a Director so richly endowed cannot be found, what must be done? My answer is, that if God is leading the soul by extraordinary ways—I mean by the mountain-path of divine contemplation—the most indispensable quality to be looked to in the choice of a Director is learning; for it is not given to all to comprehend certain exalted degrees of prayer, or to be acquainted with certain narrow and perilous pathways by which the soul must travel before it can arrive at those dizzy heights. A man of prayer, says St. Teresa, who confers with learned men, will be safe from the illusions of the devil, unless indeed he himself choose to be deluded.* But if the person is journeying to perfection along the beaten track of grace, there is not the same need of extraordinary learning for safe guidance; it is enough if the Director have an ordinary amount of knowledge. What is required for such a one, is a Confessor of virtue and experience, and still more, of burning zeal, who will have the welfare of his penitents at heart; and there should also be found a lively interest in their progress, and a loving solicitude to secure a constant advance in virtue. This is the idea of the seraphic Saint above quoted. It is, observes St. Teresa, of very great importance that a Director should be a man of good judgment, that is to say, gifted with ability and experience; but if he be at the same time a learned man, this will be an exceeding great advantage. But if all three qualifications cannot be found united, the first two are of the greater moment.

113. The misfortune, however, is, that most men, when they

* The Interior Castle. Mansion 4, cap. 1.

have to choose a Director, do not care much whether he be possessed of any of the above-mentioned qualities, but they take into consideration only whether he is easy-going, and ready to make great allowance for their failings and to conform himself to their character and natural inclinations. The very persons who would never dream of employing a physician who was wanting in learning, prudence, or experience, to cure them of some bodily ailment, do not care for such defects when they have to choose a spiritual physician to heal their souls. But what will it profit you, cries out St. Basil, to have abandoned the vanities of the world, if the next thing done by you is to take for your guide a blind man, who, instead of leading you on to perfection, can but drag you along with himself into the ditch, or over the precipice?*

CHAPTER IV.

WITH WHAT CANDOUR AND OPENNESS OF SOUL WE MUST CONFER WITH OUR DIRECTOR.

114. In order that the learning, virtue, and experience of the Director may prove a really useful and efficacious means for the attainment of perfection, the person who is seeking after perfection must be careful to turn to account the three great gifts mentioned in the preceding Chapter, by opening his conscience to the Director with great sincerity, and by carefully attending to the wise counsels given; because, if he act in any other way, the high excellence of the Director will be of no more service than is the learning of some eminent professor to a scholar who is wanting in application.

115. Devout Christians, however, who wish to advance in

* Si vero quod cum tuo corpore agere mitius volueris, magistrum tibi aliquem quæsieris tecum se ad tua vitia demittentem, vel ut verius dicam, tecum unâ in eamdem perniciem corruentem: frustra mundanis rebus nuncium remittendi laborem suscepisti; et cæcum tibi ducem ascivisti, cujus ductum secuto in foveam tibi sit procidendum. Loc. cit.

virtue should here take notice, that it is not enough for true progress in spirit, to disclose to their ghostly fathers, in confession, grievous sins of commission or omission into which they may fall through human frailty; but they ought, besides, to make known the passions of their souls, their bad inclinations, the thoughts that possess their minds, and the disorderly affections of their hearts, in order to receive right rules of conduct as to the way in which they are to bring under control all these ill-regulated interior movements. For, as a sick man is not satisfied to make known to his physician the general nature of his malady, but recounts to him all its symptoms, and all the inconveniences felt by him as to sleep or meals, and as to the effects of the medicines prescribed, so that the physician may form a correct judgment of the case; in like manner, he that would gain true health of spirit should disclose every unruly thought and disordered affection that troubles his soul. Cassian tells us that the advice given in those early times to the monks, who withdrew into the cloister to lead a life of perfection, was always this—to lay open at once to their Directors every thought that gave them trouble.* The holy Abbot Moses, as Cassian again tells us, used to give the same advice, saying, that we must overcome all repugnance and false shame, and lay bare to our Spiritual Father every movement of our souls. † Abbot Isaac went farther still, and said, that God will protect with His special grace those who do not hide any disquieting thought from the knowledge of their superior. ‡ St. Basil maintains the same;§ St. Benedict the same;‖ other saintly founders of great religious orders still the same. It is related in the life of St. Theodosius the Cenobite, that after devoting the night-time to spiritual reading and holy contempla

* Instituuntur, nullas penitus cogitationes prurientes in corde perniciosâ confusione celare; sed confestim, ut exortæ fuerint, eas suo patefacere seniori. Institut. Renunt., lib. iv., cap. 9.

† Semper seniorum summâ cautione sunt sectanda vestigia, atque ad eos cuncta, quæ in nostris cordibus oriuntur, sublato confusionis velamine, deferenda. Collat. ij., cap. 11.

‡ Aperi cogitationes tuas patribus tuis, et gratia Dei proteget te.

§ In Regul. 26.

‖ Suæ Regulæ, cap 7.

tion, he would spend the day in receiving, one by one, his children in religion who came to consult him, and to talk over all the thoughts which disturbed their peace of mind.* From all this I infer, that to make known to our Director all that passes in our minds and hearts, is a most important rule of the spiritual life, laid down by the Holy Fathers, and constantly practised by spiritual men from the earliest ages of the Church.

116. In the second place, it may be remarked, that whoever would travel straight, and without wandering, along the road of perfection, must further discover to his guide every temptation of the devil, no matter how hideous or blasphemous, how frightful or shameful soever it may be. And this should be done, not only to obtain from the Director the arms wherewith to fight and to conquer, that is to say, to procure from him preservatives against temptation, but also, by this frank avowal, to take away all strength from our enemies, to disarm them, and put them to flight: for the devil is truly a robber, who comes to plunder the soul, and so he follows the practice of robbers, who are no sooner found out than they run away. Devout souls experience the truth of this every day, when, on telling their Director the suggestions with which their enemy attacks and harasses them, their trouble of mind either at once vanishes altogether, or is to a great extent appeased and quieted. St. Dorotheus relates how St. Macarius one day saw the devil going round to his monks, and offering them something to drink. All, however, put it away with signs of contempt and disgust. One alone put out his hand and took the poisoned cup, lifted it to his lips, and drank the fatal draught. Then the holy Abbot knew that this man alone, of all his monks, kept his conscience closed to his Director; that he was the only one who never revealed the temptations of the enemy, as he preferred to guide himself: and that he was therefore the only one whom the devil could poison with his deadly potion.†

117. It will be well suited to my argument if I relate here what

* Interdiu autem ad eum accedentes, qui erant ex spiritu ei geniti filii, eum seorsum interrogabant propter cogitationem, quæ eis afferebat molestiam. Metaph. In vitâ S. Theod. Cœnobitæ.

† Nam quisquis, illius præsentit insidias, accurrit illico, excogitationes suas

passed between St. Astio and his Spiritual Father, St. Epictetus.* One day the holy youth was going with his pitcher in his hand to draw water at the spring, when the devil, in the disguise of a brigand, assaulted him in the way with a temptation against purity, and, what is worse, excited in him such a feeling of repugnance and shame at the thought of manifesting it to the Saint his master, that he could not find courage to tell him; yet this notwithstanding, he endeavoured with all his might to drive away the unclean imagination. But when he found that, after a struggle of three whole days, he had not succeeded in banishing this suggestion of the devil from his mind and heart, he began to lose hope, and sank into a deep melancholy. St. Epictetus, meantime, noticing the unwonted cloud on the brow of his young disciple, and his dejected countenance, asked, "What has happened to you, my child? The joy that usually shines in your face seems overcast to-day." St. Astio, throwing himself upon his knees, disclosed the temptation with all sincerity. Who would believe it? No sooner had Astio made the avowal, than he saw a black and hideous figure issue from his breast, bearing a lighted torch, the symbol of temptations of the flesh, and fly off, shrieking as he went, "Your confession, Astio, has robbed me of all my strength, and forced me to take flight."†

118. Something not unlike this happened to Abbot Serapion, as is related by Cassian, on the authority of Abbot Moses. Serapion in his youth used constantly, after taking his repast with his Director and Master, Abbot Thomas, to carry off by stealth a loaf of bread, and eat it in security on the sly. He had never found courage to discover to his superior this temptation to gluttony, to which attack of the demon he daily succumbed. It so happened that one day there was a Spiritual Conference in the Abbot's cell, and the discussion turned upon the fearful risk which those incur who keep the temptations of our common

quascumque latentes aperit Patri, et sic auxilium invenit in tempore tentationis, et hâc de causâ non potuit adversus eos iniquus insidiator. Infelicem illum unum invenit, qui se ipsum regeret et instrueret. Doctrina 5.

* Spec. Exempl., Dist. 8, Exempl. 21.

† Confessio tua, Astio, magnas meas contrivit hodie vires.

enemy concealed from their Director. Serapion, pierced to the heart with remorse, fell on his knees before all the assembled monks, and, with a flood of tears, confessed his sin, drew forth and showed to them all the loaf which, as usual, he then had with him concealed in his bosom. At once the Abbot Thomas said to him, "My child, fear nothing by exposing your enemy; you have already conquered him. From this time forward you will be free from the temptation with which the devil has so long cruelly tyrannised over you."* The holy old man had scarcely finished speaking, when he saw issue from the bosom of the youth a lurid flame, which filled the cell with a noisome stench; a sign that the devil, disconcerted and utterly routed by the generous confession, was beating a shameful retreat. And, accordingly, the young man was never again tormented by any such temptation. In recounting these wonders, my object has been to prove to my readers that nothing dispirits the devil so much, nothing casts him down so utterly, nothing has so great power to force him to withdraw, as a full and frank disclosure made to one's Spiritual Father. No one is more daring than a robber as long as he is behind shelter; no one is more cowardly than he when driven from his hiding-place. The character of the devil is nothing different.

119. For all this, it is not enough to lay open to our Director the movements of our passions and the temptations of our enemy; we must, moreover, confer with him about the method which we pursue in our prayers, the inspiration and lights we receive, the mortifications and penances with which we chastise our body, and all our good works, all the gifts and graces with which God Almighty enriches us; and we must do this purely and solely that we may be set right, if ever we should swerve from the straight path of virtue. St. Gregory says that even vices often have the semblance of virtues.† It is the business of our Spiritual

* Confide, ait, O puer: absolvit te ab hâc captivitate, etiam me tacente, confessio tua. Victor namque in adversarium tuum hodie triumphasti, validius tuâ confessione elidens, quam ipse fueras ab eo tuâ taciturnitate dejectus . . et ideo jam te post hanc publicationem tuam nequissimus spiritus iste nullatenus inquietabit ulterius. Collat. ij., cap. 11.

† Plerumque vitia virtutes se esse mentiuntur. Pastoral., p. ij., cap. 9.

Father, continues the same holy writer, to discern by his own unerring judgment, what is good and what bad, what is suited to our wants, and the manner place and time in which our good intentions should be reduced to practice.* Now, if you do not inform your Director of all that you do, though all be upright and good and pious, how can he form this judgment regarding you? how can he give you a safe rule of conduct? Man, as St. Augustine observes, cannot penetrate into your conscience to read what is going on there: for it lies open to God alone.†

120. What should give us more cause to fear, is the thought that the devil does not always tempt us by directly inciting us to evil, but also often tempts us by urging us to good, although when he proposes good to us, he always has in view our ultimate, ruin. The wicked one, as the Apostle says, transforms himself into an angel of light;‡ to some souls he suggests, in time of prayer, good thoughts and affections, which in themselves lead to God, and by this false light he lures them astray. Others he pushes on to excessive penance, to make them injure their health, and so break down in the road to perfection. He kindles in many souls an imprudent zeal, in order to stir up discord; and in many others an ill-ordered and indiscreet charity, to make them lose their vocation: and he has a thousand other devices at command, which this is not the place to unfold. If then penitents keep the good that they are doing from the knowledge of their Director, how is the Confessor ever to detect all the snares which the foul fiend is spreading for them at every step as they move along the way of perfection? To put the pious reader on his guard, I am sure that I need do no more than relate the unhappy lot of a self-willed monk who chose to keep his own counsel, and was hurried to his destruction by the devil disguised as an angel of light.§ This monk had been consecrated to God from his

* Quod bene rationale judicii vocatur, quia debet rector semper subtili examine bona, malaque discernere, et quæ vel quibus, quando, vel qualiter congruant studiose cogitare. Ibid.

† Neque enim homo pater tuus, et frater tuus intrare potest conscientiam tuam, quam novit Deus. Serm. De Ovibus, n. 9.

‡ Ipse enim satanas transfigurat se in angelum lucis. 2 ad Corinth. xi. 14.

§ In Lib. Doctr. Patrum. Lib. de Patient. et Fortit., n. 29, 30.

youth upward, in a monastery of the greatest repute among the ancient Fathers, and led a life of exact observance in the practice of all religious virtues, and in such austerity, that he had restricted himself to one meal a week, and was sustained by the grace of God more than by the material food which he took so seldom, and in such scanty measure. The holy youth was not only a model to all the monks, but a marvel to the Abbot himself, who was never tired of praising God for the virtue which he saw shining in him with more and more brightness every day. However, the devil, not being able to endure the sight of such progress in holiness, changed himself into an angel of light, and began to tempt the young man under pretence of greater good. He put into his heart a keen desire of burying himself in the desert, there to lead in solitude the life of an angel rather than of a human being. The youth signified this craving to the Superior; and though he was dissuaded by him, on the ground that when he should be alone in the desert, with no Director to help him, he would be unable to save himself from the artifices of the enemy of mankind, still he determined to follow his own opinion. He set out from the monastery, and took his way to an unfrequented spot, where he built himself a little cell, and gave himself up entirely to contemplation, to spiritual reading, to fasting, and severest penance. After some years spent in this kind of life, there one day came to his cell an Abbot of venerable aspect, with pale, emaciated face, and long white beard. Now, this was no other than the devil, concealed all the while under that false garb of sanctity. At the sight, the hermit felt afraid, and fell on his knees to pray. Then he arose. Be not alarmed, said the seeming Abbot; let us both fall to prayer together. Their devotions finished, the pretended Abbot inquired, How long have you been in this desert? Six years, he replied. Six years! repeated the false monk, in feigned astonishment; why, I have been serving God eleven years in this wild place, and I have never even heard of you, except that, quite lately, some four days back, a monk who lives not far from here brought me some account of you; and I have come with all speed to find you out, both that I may observe the law of charity, and that I may commune with you

touching a doubt that keeps me in continual trouble of mind. We live all the year round shut up in our cells; we never go near a church; we never receive the most Sacred Body of our Redeemer; this thought has caused me very great anxiety; now, therefore, since I can have your company, and you mine, I propose that we go every Sunday in quest of some church, and there make our devotions like the rest of the faithful. The suggestion pleased the young solitary, and on the next Sunday, he set off with the traitor Abbot; after a long journey, they arrived at a monastery, and addressed themselves to prayer in the church. Rising from his prayer, the deluded youth cast his eyes around, but did not see the companion who was so lately standing at his side; he left the church, and sought him far and wide without finding him. He next inquired of the monks who dwelt there, and received answer, that when he came to the monastery they had not seen any one accompany him. Then he became aware that this Abbot, apparently so austere and devout, was the devil, who, under pretext of taking him to church, had only wanted to decoy him from his solitude. However, he was not much distressed at this, for he said to himself: Well, he has not, at any rate, taken me to an abode of vice, nor even to theatres or dances; at the most, he has only taken me to the church. There can be no great harm in that. And he went back, well pleased, to his hermitage. Not long after, the devil came to dupe him again—this time in the guise of a man of the world. Standing at the door of his cell, he fixed his eyes upon the solitary, and scanned him closely from head to foot. This must be the very man, he exclaimed; terribly altered, indeed, by long penance; but the old features are still there; it is he, beyond all doubt. The monk, surprised at this sudden apparition, asked the visitor why he looked so fixedly, and what he wanted, and who he was. I am, said the stranger, a young man whose house is near your father's residence; tell me, are you not So-and-so, who left the world so many years ago? Is not your father's name So-and-so? and your mother's name So-and-so? You see I know all about you and your family. So then, since in the course of my travels I have chanced upon you in this forest, I have some

sad news to tell you. You must know that your mother is dead, and your sister is dead, and your father, only a few days ago, also followed them to another life. At his death, as he had no one to whom to bequeath his property, he left it all to you, to be by you distributed to the poor, and laid out in pious works for the benefit of your own soul and his. The monk, on hearing this, replied, I have forsaken the world, and have no intention of mixing myself up in worldly concerns. But bethink you, rejoined the other, of the severe account you will have to render at the tribunal of God, if, through fault of yours, all this money, meant for the support of the poor, and the embellishment of churches, shall come to fall into the hands of men who will waste it in gambling, extravagance, riotous living, and debauchery. And, besides, who is to prevent you, when you have distributed your inheritance according to your father's wishes, from coming back to your solitary life in the desert? At these words the simple-minded monk felt himself convinced, and determined to go and claim possession on behalf of the poor, and to return afterwards to his cell once more. He made his way to his native country, when, lo and behold! as he approached his father's house, he saw him all alive and well, coming towards him. To his inquiries why he had left his solitary life and returned home, he had not the heart to say that he was coming to claim his inheritance on the understanding that his father was dead; but he answered, in the words which the devil put into his mouth for the express purpose of engaging him to stay in the world, that it was the great love he bore to his father which had brought him back. At these words his father threw his arms round his neck and kissed him, and welcomed him affectionately. The love of flesh and blood began to revive in his heart. By conversing with his old friends, he began to conceive fresh affection for them; then he became attached to the comforts of life; and, to cut a long story short, the miserable man soon came to fall into degrading sins of impurity, for which he never made any atonement, and, without ever a thought of his monastery or of his desert solitude, he lived a wretched life in the world. In this history we see before our eyes in vivid colours the devil disguised

as an angel of light, conducting to evil under a show of good. He lured the poor man from his monastery by suggesting an unwise desire of higher perfection; he dragged him from his cell under pretence of taking him to church; he carried him back to his native place by conjuring up before him an imposing array of alms-deeds and works of mercy. What the enemy of mankind did then, appearing in visible shape, the same he is doing every day unseen, in the midst of us. To that man he spoke audibly, whispering into his ear pious but delusive thoughts; but he introduces similar suggestions straight into our minds and hearts. Whoever, therefore, would walk in safety along the road of perfection, should lay open to his Director, not only all the movements of his passions, and all the temptations of the bad angel, but, moreover, all the things that he is doing, or that he intends to do; and he should submit all to the guidance of his Confessor.

CHAPTER V.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS FOR THE DIRECTOR AS TO HIS DEALINGS WITH SUCH AS PLACE THEMSELVES UNDER HIS DIRECTION.

121. FIRST suggestion. I do not mean to give rules in this Chapter for the discernment of various spirits; for this is not a subject which can be compressed into a few pages: it would want a whole volume to itself. I propose now merely to give a few hints to Directors about the manner of dealing with their penitents so as to be of real service to them. My first remark shall be this—that a Director who wishes to gain souls to God must have a heart overflowing with charity. I will say with St. Paul: *Put on the bowels of mercy.** Let every Confessor bear in mind that the first word his penitent utters when kneeling at his feet is, Father! as if to tell him that he must not be a stern judge or a pitiless tyrant, but an affectionate father. He should call to

* Induite vos viscera misericordiæ. Ad Coloss., cap. iij., 12.

mind that the human heart is not allured by the vinegar and gall of severity, but by the sweet honey of love. Severity may serve for taming wild beasts, but affection alone can win a human heart. The Director should show such kindness to those who have recourse to him, that they may feel no difficulty in revealing all the secrets of their hearts; that they may be ready to receive, and eager to fulfil, all his advice. This is the teaching of St. Gregory the Great: a Spiritual Father should be of such a character, that his subjects may without any false shame lay bare to him all the hidden depths of their hearts; such, that in time of temptation they may run to him as into their mother's arms; such, that when they have fallen they may find in his words and prayers and tears the cure and the comfort they need.* No doubt it is proper at times to employ some degree of severity, either to master the obstinate heart of one who will not yield to gentleness, or to mortify the soul that has virtue enough to bear up under such trials. Still, kindness must ever be the common rule, for experience goes to show that from it most good is gained.

122. Second suggestion. Let Directors take good heed never to show the least sign of being shocked when their penitents are declaring their temptations, no matter how loathsome or blasphemous or frightful these may be; and this both because the poor souls are not generally in fault, and also because to act otherwise would only destroy their confidence, close their lips, and prevent them from ever again venturing to avow their weaknesses. In the life of St. Bernard we find that at first he did not make much allowance for the involuntary foibles to which poor human nature is ever liable, and from which solitaries of the austerest life are not exempt; and he thus caused not a little dissatisfaction and trepidation among his monks. But when he had been admonished of this fault, he began to compassionate and console them with all that gentleness which was so charac-

* Tales sese, qui præsunt, exhibeant, quibus subjecti occulta sua quæque pandere non erubescant: ut cum tentationum fluctus parvuli toleraut, ad pastoris mentem, quasi ad sinum matris recurrant: et hoc quo se inquinari pulsantis culpæ sordibus prævident, exhortationis ejus solatio et lacrymis orationis lavent. Pastoral., lib. ij., cap. 5.

teristic of his affectionate heart. If, therefore, a Director has committed any similar mistake, let him also endeavour to set himself right, lest his way of dealing with his penitents should prove at once distasteful and injurious to them.

123. I cannot here forbear alluding to a case recorded by Cassian, which gives much matter for serious reflection to those who easily fall into this kind of indiscretion. A young monk, grievously tormented with temptations of sense, and afflicted beyond measure thereby, sought counsel of an old monk, and hoped to come away from his interview consoled and even cured. The old man listened attentively to all that was said, but instead of imparting comfort in so deep distress and giving strength for the fight, he began to speak in a loud tone, and called the man a wretched sinner, unworthy of the religious state, and of the very name of monk.* The unfortunate youth lost all heart, and fell into such deep despair that he resolved to abandon the monastery and religious life, and return to his secular occupations; for he said to himself, I am not fit to be a monk, therefore I will go back to the world, and be what I was before; and so saying, he directed his steps to the city. Well was it for him that he met on his way that great servant of God, Abbot Apollo, who, seeing him sad and downhearted, guessed from the dark clouds upon his face the fierce tumult that was raging in his heart; and accosting him at once, inquired the cause of all this melancholy. But as the young man, overmastered by the strength of his passions, made him no answer, he went on gently plying him with his questions, till he drew from him the full account of his misfortunes, and of his resolution to go back to the world. Then the wise and zealous Abbot strove to raise his spirits, and bade him put away his fear, for that he himself, although in the decline of life, had to endure similar trials every day; and he exhorted him to put his trust in God, Who would never have allowed him to fall, and would, in His own good time, set him altogether free from the affliction: he persuaded him in the end to stay at

* Miserabilem pronuntians et indignum et monachi nomine et professione censendum, qui potuerit hujusmodi vitio et concupiscentiâ titillari. Collat. ij., cap. 13.

least another day in his cell, and cherish the hope that within that space the fury of the storm would cease. Having spoken thus, the holy man went to the monastery where the foolish old monk was living; and, before setting foot in his cell, prayed hard that God would let him feel in his own person that sting of the flesh which gave the young monk so much pain, in order that he might learn by his own experience to feel compassion for others. The Abbot had scarcely finished his prayer, when he saw a black figure engaged in hurling fiery darts at the monk. The unhappy man, with his face all flushed, ran to and fro like one distracted: he went in and out of his cell, till at last giving way to the temptation, he set out for the city to seek opportunity of satisfying the passion that was consuming him. The Abbot met him: "Go back," he said, "go back to your cell, and know that the devil has never tempted you till now, perhaps because he did not know of your existence, or because he made no account of you, and did not reckon you among the heroes whom he has to conquer by force of arms, seeing that the first suggestion sufficed to lay you low. Learn, then, at the cost of your own experience, to have pity for others, and not to use language that will drive them wild and throw them into despair, as you did a little while ago with the poor youth who came to you for comfort and advice." * This story needs no comment: it shows clearly enough the danger to which a Director exposes his tempted and afflicted penitents, if instead of encouraging and consoling them, he appears shocked at their temptations, be they what they may.

124. Third suggestion. Again, if the penitent is not merely assailed by temptation, but has actually fallen into serious faults, or even grievous sin—as may sometimes be the case with those who are aiming at perfection—it is doubly necessary that the

* Disce itaque tuis exemplis laborantibus condolere, et periclitantes nequaquam perniciosâ desperatione deterrere, nec durissimis sermonibus asperare; sed potius levi blandâque consolatione resolvere: et secundum præceptum sapientissimi Salomonis, eruere eos, qui ducuntur ad mortem, et redimere eos, qui interficiuntur; nostrique Salvatoris exemplo arundinem quassatam non conterere et linum fumigans non extinguere. Ibid.

Director should refrain from showing symptoms of surprise, or breaking out into any angry exclamation, or giving way to intemperate zeal; because persons of delicate conscience, after falls of this kind, are commonly plunged into deep dejection and despondency: and they require to be encouraged with gentle words and to be moved to confidence. And if ever, to their misfortune, they chance upon a priest who causes their hearts to shrink within them, such persons sink lower still, they lose all their courage, and run great risk of forsaking once and for ever the pathway of perfection. In these cases a Director should follow St. Paul's counsel: he should straightway enter into his own heart, and, putting away all self-delusion, acknowledge that he is himself liable to similar falls. This done, let him in the spirit of gentleness give what instruction is needed, informing his penitent correctly of the extent of his fall, leading him to calm acts of humility, to thorough self-distrust at the sight of his sin, and to perfect confidence in Almighty God: finally, let him suggest the remedies which he judges best suited to guard against a like relapse.* St. Augustine, expounding the words of Scripture to which we are alluding, has some beautiful thoughts, and I could wish that they were engraven deep on the heart of every Confessor and guide of souls, and on my own most of all. To know, says the holy Doctor, whether a man be truly virtuous, there is no surer test than to see whether on occasion of another's fall, far from insulting the guilty man, and piercing his soul with sharp words, he sweetly strives to deliver him from his evil state, and to provide a suitable remedy.†

125. St. John the Evangelist gives us the true idea of this gentleness in an act of heroic sweetness and charity which he himself performed on behalf of a person who had fallen from a state of perfection to the lowest depths of misery. Eusebius‡

* Fratres, si præoccupatus fuerit homo in aliquo delicto, vos, qui spirituales estis, hujusmodi instruite in spiritu lenitatis, considerans teipsum, ne et tu tenteris. Ad Gal., cap. vj.

† Nihil sic probat spiritualem virum, quam peccati alieni tractatio; cum liberationem ejus potius, quam insultationem; potius auxilia, quam convicia meditatur: et quantum facultas tribuitur, suscipit. In verba cit. Apost.

‡ Lib. iij, cap. 53.

relates in his Ecclesiastical History, that whilst the Apostle was traversing Asia Minor, engaged in founding new Churches, he fell in with a young man of quick intelligence and lively disposition, and judging him likely to make good progress in Christian perfection, he gave him a warm recommendation to the Bishop of the city, whom he asked to take good care of him. The Bishop, carrying out this injunction, took the youth into his own house, baptised him, instructed him, and fed him with the milk of devotion and piety. When it seemed that he was a really devout and perfect Christian, the Bishop began to show great confidence, and to relax something of domestic discipline. But, alas! how weak is the virtue of the young! When the youth felt that the reins were thrown loose on his neck, he began, like a colt just escaped from the bridle, to run wild in the ways of wickedness, and going on from sin to sin, from lesser to ever greater excesses, before long went so far as to commit robberies, murders, and other such awful crimes. Nay, in the end he made himself captain of a band of brigands, and, posting himself on a hill near the city, he lay in wait for unfortunate travellers to despoil them of life and goods. Such are the depths to which men may fall when they begin to slide back from the height of perfection. Meanwhile the Beloved Disciple returned to that city to settle some business of the Church, and called upon the Bishop to give an account of the youth who had been confided to his care. "He is dead," said the Bishop, heaving a deep sigh. "How dead?" asked St. John:—"in soul or in body?" "In soul," replied the Bishop, "and irrecoverably too; for the lost man has put himself at the head of a gang of robbers, and leads the life of an outlaw, among the fastnesses of yonder mountain." Hearing this the Apostle rent his garments in sign of sorrow, then: "Quick," he cried, "find me a horse and guide." Springing on the saddle, he set out in haste to seek the straying sheep. As soon as he reached the foot of the mountain, he was surrounded and taken prisoner by the robbers who were mounting guard. "This is the very thing I wanted," said the Saint to the brigands; "I wanted to fall into your hands: quick! lead me to your captain. Either I must be his prisoner or he must be mine." But the young

robber came of his own accord, with arms in his hands, with his brows knit, and heart full of evil intent. When he caught sight of the holy Apostle from afar, he knew him at once, and feeling ashamed of himself, he turned and fled. The Saint set spurs to his horse, and pursued him at full speed over hill and through dale, just as his Divine Master sought the lost sheep in the mountain defiles; and, forgetting alike his dignity and his declining years, he cried out aloud: "Stay, my son, stay! from whom are you flying? from your father? Of whom are you in fear? Can it be that you are in dread of a feeble old man, who has no other weapons to wound you with than the darts of his love? Stay, my child! fear not; doubt not that there still is hope of salvation for you. I take all your sins on my own shoulders: I engage to answer for you to God: I will do penance: I will wash them away with my tears: I will give my blood, my life for you: only stay, my dear son, stay!" The wretched youth was pierced to the quick by these arrows of love shot straight from that tender heart. He stopped and turned, and keeping his eyes on the ground, blushing for shame, threw away the weapons he had with him, and at once putting off the ferocity which he had cherished in his heart, ran and prostrated himself at the feet of the Saint. Then, with sobs and groans and a flood of tears, he allowed vent to the grief to which his tongue refused to give utterance. But all the while, amid his signs of deep repentance, he kept his right hand buried in his bosom; that guilty hand, stained with so many deeds of death and the blood of so many innocent persons. When the Apostle saw this contrition, he leaped down from his horse and threw himself at the murderer's feet; then casting his arms round his neck, he mingled his tears and his sobs and groans with those of the penitent sinner. "Fear not, my son!" he said, "for I solemnly pledge myself to win for you from my dear Lord Jesus the pardon of your crimes." Then he forced from his bosom that red right hand, and in the excess of his tenderness he kissed it again and again with his saintly lips. He carried him back to the Church, and by his prayers and tears obtained the pardon of his sins. He softened his heart with his gentle words, he tamed him, restored his feet to the right road of

Christian virtue; nay, even brought him to such high perfection that afterwards he was not only able, but even willing, to make him the Bishop of that town. In this remarkable incident Directors may see reflected, as in a mirror, the conduct they ought to pursue when they wish to lead back to God some soul which has fallen from the state of perfection into the gulf of mortal sin.

126. Fourth suggestion. But if, despite the Director's best endeavours, the penitent remain incorrigibly fixed in his evil state, what, then, must be done? Must all hope of his salvation and perfection be abandoned? No; St. Augustine says: for the conversion of the demons alone is beyond all hope, since we know for certain that they have been cast off by God and condemned to eternal fire.* We have no such sad assurance in the case of human beings, nor have we the means of knowing whether bad men will die in their evil ways; for it may be, that Almighty God, by means of His powerful grace, will some day conquer their obstinacy, and in the end carry their hearts by storm. So far I have been quoting St. Augustine.† And St. John Chrysostom likewise tells us never to cease feeling compassion for sinners, helping them to the best of our power, ever giving them fresh counsel, and showing solicitude for their conversion. He tells us that we ought to strive to soften their hearts by our sighs and tears, like some tender mother, who, though she knows well that the life of her darling child is despaired of, does not for all that forsake him, but keeps always close by his side; with sighs and tears, she clasps him in her arms and kisses him; she utters her low plaint, never omitting to give such aid as she can while life remains: and this the more because the poor woman cannot, with all her wailings, save her son from the death of the body. But we are able to save the souls of our neighbours—even when their case seems most desperate—from eternal death.‡ Such,

* Diabolus et angeli ejus in Scripturis Sanctis manifestati sunt nobis, quod ad ignem æternum sunt destinati. Ipsorum tantum desperanda est correctio. In Ps. liv.

† In eo quod malus est quis eorum, utrum usque ad finem perseveraturus sit, ignoramus. Ibid.

‡ An non vides parentes, quomodo filiis suis licet desperatis assident lacry-

then should be the feelings of a Spiritual Father. More than all, he should address himself to prayer, because, properly speaking, the reformation of souls is not due to any industry of ours, but is the work of grace. Grace must govern. The tongue of the Director must be guided by grace; the mind of the penitent must be illumined by grace, if he is to feel the force of the Director's words; if he is to act upon them, it must be after grace has stimulated his will; it is grace that must give him energy to go through with his undertaking. Now, there is one only way of acquiring this grace, and it is by fervent and repeated prayer.

127. Fifth suggestion. Lastly, let Directors observe that to the gentleness, which we have so far been recommending, there must be joined patience in bearing with the annoyance which many penitents often cause to their Spiritual Fathers. Confessors will see kneeling before them all kinds of characters,—persons who are melancholy timid faint-hearted, restless rude confused, wordy and tiresome in the stories they tell. In such cases let them call to mind St. Paul's advice, that to us, who are Directors of souls, endowed with greater grasp of mind and strength of will, it pertains in a special manner to have compassion on the infirmities of these our weaker brethren.*

128. St. Bernard says that the whole task and burthen of a Spiritual Superior lies in the patient endurance of the failings of those under his care; for it is not a task or grievance, but rather a relief and a delight, to afford direction to virtuous, highly-gifted, noble souls. But in this very bearing with their weaknesses the cure of faint-hearted souls must mainly be sought. Let the Director, then, reflect that he is the Father of these timid melancholy, ill-mannered, querulous people. It is his duty to

mantes, exosculantes, omnia quæ possunt admoventes ad extremum usque alitum? Hoc tu quoque facito pro fratribus. Et tamen illi non possunt lacrymis et lamentis neque morbum depellere, neque mortem imminentem abigere. Tu vero frequenter poteris animam deploratam per lamenta revocare, ac suscitare. Dedisti consilium, nec persuasisti; illacryma; punge frequenter; suspira paululum, ut tua sollicitudo incutiat illi verecundiam, atque se convertat ad salutem. Conc. i. De Lazar.

* Debemus . . . nos firmiores imbecillitates infirmorum sustinere. Ad Rom. xv. 1.

comfort and exhort them lovingly, and to temper his reproofs with mildness.*

129. It is not, however, enough to say, that a Director should look on himself as a Father. I ought to have said with St. Bernard, that he must feel in his heart that he is the Mother of his penitents. Laying aside, therefore, all severity harshness and rigour, he must bear in his bosom a mother's tenderness, and treat his spiritual children with all the fondness of a mother's love. "Learn," says the Saint to Superiors—"learn to be not the masters, but the mothers, of the souls entrusted to your care. Engage them to love you more than fear you; and if at times you have need to employ severity, be yours the sternness of a Father, never that of a tyrant. Your breast should be full of the milk of kindness, not swelling with the bitterness of disdain. Why make the yoke of their subjection press heavy upon them, when it is your duty to lighten it by taking their burthens upon your own shoulders? And why must your spiritual children fly from you, when they ought to run to you as to their mother's arms? If you be spiritual men, instruct them with all gentleness, reprove them with all charity, bearing in mind that even you yourselves may fall into the like infirmities."† Beautiful words, well worthy not only to be once read, but to be pondered most diligently at our leisure.

130. Directors should remark nevertheless that in dealing with women they ought not to make display of this spiritual love, but should keep it locked up in their hearts, lest otherwise a strong

* Hoc onus animarum est infirmarum. Nam quæ sanæ sunt, portari non indigent, ac per hoc nec onus sunt. Quotiescumque igitur de tuis inveneris tristes, pusillanimes, murmuriosos, ipsorum te patrem, ipsorum te noveris esse abbatem. Consolando, exhortando, increpando agis opus tuum, portas onus tuum et portando sanas, quos sanando portas. Epist. 73.

† Discite subditorum matres vos esse debere non dominos. Studete magis amari quam metui. Etsi interdum severitate opus sit, paterna sit non tyrannica. Matres fovendo, patres vos corripiendo, exhibeatis. Mansuescite, ponite feritatem; suspendite verbera, producite ubera: pectora lacte pinguescant, non lympha turgescant. Quid jugum vestrum super eos aggravatis, quorum potius onera portare debetis? Cur morsus a serpente parvulus fugit conscientiam sacerdotis, ad quem eum magis oportuerat, tamquam ad sinum recurrere matris? Si spirituales estis, instruite hujusmodi in spiritu lenitatis, considerans unusquisque seipsum, ne et ipse tentetur. In Cant.—Serm. 23

attachment might grow up on either side. It will suffice that Confessors show women the kindness to which they are entitled, exactly as prudent mothers do, who, in order not to spoil their children, take care not to let them see all the affection which they cherish in their hearts.

ARTICLE IV.

Third means of acquiring Perfection. The reading of Spiritual Books.

CHAPTER I.

THE ADVANTAGE OF READING SPIRITUAL BOOKS PROVED FROM THE AUTHORITY OF THE HOLY FATHERS.

131. ST. BERNARD, in his "Ladder for Religious," explains the four steps by which we mount to God and to perfection; for, as we have already seen, perfection essentially consists in union with God, our last end; and he says that the four degrees are reading and meditation, prayer and contemplation. He cites the words of our Saviour, *Seek, and you shall find: knock, and it shall be opened unto you;* and applying them to the degrees or means of perfection, he says that by reading we seek God, by meditation we find Him, by prayer we knock at the door of His heart, and by contemplation we enter into the theatre of His divine beauties, which have been opened to our mind by reading, meditation, and prayer.* He remarks that reading is nothing more than the fixing our attentive gaze upon whatever the Holy Scriptures or other good books present to our notice; that meditation is an act of the mind, by which, under the guidance of our own reflections, we follow the track of the heavenly virtues, which

* Salvator dicit: "Quærite et invenietis; pulsate et aperietur vobis." Quærite legendo et invenietis meditando; pulsate orando et aperietur vobis contemplando. De Modo Orandi.

are themselves hidden from us; that prayer is an affection of the will, by which we win from God release from evil and acquisition of the spiritual treasures suited to our wants; and that contemplation is the repose of the mind in God, by which the soul is raised to taste the delights of heavenly bliss.* Reading, the Saint goes on, is like spiritual food presented to the palate of the soul: meditation turns over and masticates the same by process of reasoning; in prayer its relish is perceived; contemplation is the very enjoyment of this spiritual food, which restores strength to the whole spirit. Reading does not go beyond the surface of that which is read; meditation penetrates to the core; prayer, by its petitions, seeks to gain the fruit; contemplation reposes in the possession of this fruit.†

132. Of these four steps by which we mount to perfection and to God, we shall not now treat of the one named last; both because contemplation, however useful, is not necessary for the attainment of perfection, and because it is not one of those ordinary means belonging to all alike, of which I propose to treat in the present work. Keeping close, therefore, to the teaching of St. Bernard, I lay down three means by which to arrive at perfection; they are reading, meditation, and prayer. I shall discuss the subject of reading in this present Article, and the two remaining means subsequently. In the Chapter upon which I am now engaged, I shall show how important, according to the Holy Fathers, is the reading of spiritual books to those who would make progress in the spiritual life.

133. It would be difficult to imagine the esteem which St. Jerome entertained for the reading of spiritual books, and the zeal with which he urged its constant use upon all whom he un-

* Lectio est sedula Scripturarum cum animi intentione inspectio; meditatio est studiosa mentis actio occultæ veritatis notitiam ductu propriæ rationis investigans. Oratio est devota mentis intentio in Deum pro malis amovendis et bonis acquirendis. Contemplatio est mentis in Deum suspensæ elevatio, æternæ dulcedinis gaudia degustans. Ibid.

† Lectio quasi solidum cibum ori apponit; meditatio masticat et frangit; oratio saporem acquirit; contemplatio est ipsa dulcedo, quæ jucundat et reficit. Lectio in cortice, meditatio in adipe, oratio in desiderii postulatione, contemplatio in adeptæ dulcedinis delectatione. Ibid.

dertook to help forward by his letters in the path of perfection. He recommends Salvina to have some pious book ever in her hand; for good books he says, are a strong shield to keep off all the bad thoughts which wage war upon our youth.* And he is right, for the holy thoughts with which spiritual reading fills our minds, drive back those other useless, idle, or depraved thoughts, which spring so abundantly from the rank soil of our heart. To St. Paulinus he gives the same advice,—Have always in your hand some holy book, to nourish your soul with pious reading.† He suggests to the widow Furia to read often the Holy Scriptures, and the works of those men of learning whose teaching is edifying and sound; that she may not be wearied in picking the golden atoms of wholesome instruction from the sand of their poisonous writings.‡ To Demetrias he says—Love the reading of the Holy Scriptures, if you wish the Divine Wisdom to love you, to keep and to possess you. You were wont to array yourself according to the fashion of the hour; precious gems once sparkled on your bosom, strings of pearls hung round your neck, and jewelled pendants from your ears. For the time to come, let holy readings be the jems and jewels that shall adorn your soul with pious thoughts and generous aspirations.§ It is enough to read the letters of this great Doctor of the Church to see that among the means proposed by him for the acquirement of Christian perfection, this holds a very high place.

134. St. Bernard speaks his mind on the same subject plainly enough, where he says that spiritual reading is extremely necessary for our improvement: alleging for his reason, that we come thereby to see what we ought to do, and what to shun, and how

* Semper in manibus tuis sit divina lectio, ut omnium cogitationum sagittæ, quibus adolescentia percuti solet, hujusmodi clypeo repellantur. Epist. 79, cap. 9.

† Semper in manibus sacra lectio. Epist. 53.

‡ Post Scripturas Sacras doctorum hominum tractatus lege, et illorum dumtaxat, quorum fides nota est. Non necesse habes aurum in luto quærere. Epist. 54, cap. 11.

§ Ama Scripturas Sacras et amabit te sapientia: dilige eam, et servabit te: honora illam, et amplexabitur te. Hæc monilia in pectore, et in auribus tuis hærent. Epist. 130. cap. 20.

to set about the attainment of the holy objects we have in view. It must have been this that the Royal Prophet called a lamp to point out to us the path of perfection, and to guide our steps in safety.* By reading, continues the Saint, our mind and conscience are properly educated; since from it we obtain light to perform our outward actions well, and to uplift our souls in prayer to the knowledge of the things of God. Hence this it is that fits us both for active and contemplative life.† Then, descending to details, he shows that every supernatural blessing has its origin in spiritual reading; for, he says, in reading and prayer we find the weapons we require for warring against and overthrowing the enemies of our salvation. By reading and prayer all the vicious habits of the soul are destroyed and all its defects are rooted out: we learn to despise the vanities of earth and to cultivate all the virtues. In a word these are the means appointed to lead us safely to the possession of eternal happiness.‡ It would seem impossible to say more than this in praise of spiritual reading.

135. St. Gregory illustrates the same truth by the example of a looking-glass. Spiritual books are a mirror which Almighty God places before our eyes on purpose that, viewing ourselves therein, we may correct what is amiss, and adorn ourselves with every virtue. And as vain women often go to the glass, and remove any little speck from the face, or adjust their tresses and deck themselves out with a thousand devices to make themselves lovely in the eyes of others; so should the Christian set before him good books, that he may discover in them the defects he must remove, and the virtues with which he must adorn himself in order to become pleasing in the eyes of his God.§

* Valde nobis est necessaria lectio divina: nam per lectionem discimus quid facere, quid cavere, quo tendere debeamus. Unde dicitur: Lucerna pedibus meis verbum tuum, et lumen semitis meis. Serm. 50, De Modo Vivendi.

† Per lectionem sensus et intellectus augetur. Lectio nos ad orationem instruit et ad operationem; lectio nos informat ad activam et ad contemplativam vitam. Ibid.

‡ Lectio et oratio sunt arma, quibus diabolus expugnatur. Hæc sunt instrumenta, quibus æterna beatitudo acquiritur. Per orationem et lectionem vitia destruuntur et virtutes in animâ nutriuntur. Lectio demit errorem vitæ, subtrahit hominem a vanitate mundi. Ibid.

§ Sacra Scriptura mentis oculis quasi quoddam speculum opponitur, ut

136. St. Augustine uses another illustration, equally beautiful, to excite us to the love of spiritual reading. He says that pious books are so many letters addressed to us from our heavenly country by Almighty God our tender Father, and by the Saints our loving brethren. In them they warn us of the perils we have to encounter in our mournful pilgrimage; they point out to us the lurking-places in which our enemies are awaiting us, the snares set for our feet in order to deprive us of the life of our souls, and despoil us of the priceless treasure of the divine grace; they tell us what provision of virtue we shall require that we may not faint by the road-side; they animate us to support the labours, trials, and sufferings of this toilsome journey; and they show the direct and secure road to that happy country which others like ourselves have reached. Whoever then wishes to arrive at that blessed land, and to win a place of honour there, let him often open and read these letters from Paradise.

137. Besides giving reasons to prove the necessity of spiritual reading for the attainment of Christian perfection, the Fathers adduce examples well suited to awaken in us the desire of it. From these I select one, which occurs in the Dialogues of St. Gregory,* and again in his Homilies,† hoping that it may encourage us likewise to adopt so pious a practice. A poor beggar in Rome, named Servulus, used to lie in the porch at the entrance of the Church of St. Clement. He was completely paralysed, and was not only unable to stand upright, but was even deprived of all power of turning himself from side to side, or of raising his hand to his mouth to take the necessary food. Of the alms he received, he spent part upon his own support, and part he laid aside for providing food and shelter for the poor pilgrims whom he lodged in his own miserable abode. He was most eager always to acquire spiritual books; and he had procured a good number by the outlay of money bestowed upon him in alms: for he took from the food that supports the body to supply

interna nostra facies in ipsâ videatur. Ibi etenim fœda, ibi pulchra nostra cognoscimus. Ibi sentimus quantum proficimus, ibi a profectu quam longe distamus. Moral. Lib. ij. cap. 1

* Lib. iv. cap. 14. † Homil. 15.

his spirit with the nourishment of pious reading. And as the poor man could not read himself, he made his lodgers read to him. By means of these pious readings, though he was obliged to use another's mouth, he gathered an extensive knowledge of spiritual things, and a familiar acquaintance with Holy Scripture, on which he used to discourse with great judgment, to the astonishment of all who heard him. But better far than this, he had acquired an unconquerable patience, and, in the midst of his severe sufferings, he was always thanking God, and singing hymns of praise. Feeling that the end of his life was drawing near, he summoned some of his friends, and begged them to recite some psalms with him. Whilst this was going on, he suddenly made a sign to them to stop, and said,—"Hark! Do you not hear how heaven is all ringing with music and song?" and, with these words, he gently breathed his last. After his death, that lowly dwelling place was filled with a fragrance so heavenly, that visitors were at a loss to describe the sweetness they perceived. The Holy Doctor ends his narrative by saying, that a monk of his monastery had been present at the death of this saintly poor man, and that he could not help shedding tears of tenderness in relating what he had seen.* The great eagerness which this holy sufferer had for spiritual reading is worthy of remark; as also the excellent fruits of sanctity which he procured from it, and the blessed death to which by its use he finally attained. Hence we may learn how great a help it is to the acquiring of Christian perfection.

* Cui rei monachus noster interfuit qui nunc usque vivit, et cum magno fletu attestari solet: quia quousque corpus ejus sepulturæ traderent, ab eorum naribus odoris illius fragrantia non recessit. Ibid.

CHAPTER II.

THE ADVANTAGE OF SPIRITUAL READING, SHOWN MORE IN PARTICULAR, BOTH AT THE ENTRANCE ON THE PATH OF PERFECTION AND AFTER SOME PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE.

138. RELIGIOUS truth, says St. Bernard, like a well-provided table, presents a variety of food adapted to the wants of each.* At this banquet may be found dishes specially prepared for sinners, and having power to lead them back to a life of grace. There are other kinds of food intended for the just, and able to impart the strength required for the due increase and development of the life of grace which such possess within them. Here, too, pious but untutored guests, incapable of meditation, find their food suitably prepared for giving nourishment to their simple souls. And here, also, those more highly trained, who, even apart from this hospitable board, have spiritual stores supplied to them in their fervent prayers, may yet find strengthening nourishment, and may carry away from the feast which pious reading sets before them, some good wholesome food, to which they can help themselves more at their leisure, and which they can ruminate during their meditation. By partaking of the good things that are served at this table, men of the world change, as it were, their character and become spiritual; whilst those who are already spiritual, attain the perfection of their state, and raise themselves to holiness. In one word, we have a repast prepared here, to give life and health and strength of soul to all the guests.

139. If you would bring home to yourself the power that pious reading has to bring men of the world to change their ways and to enter on the path of perfection, it is enough to think of the conversion of St. Augustine. Every one knows the extreme repugnance which the Saint felt in his soul at the thought of parting with the false pleasures of sense, and surrendering himself in full to the service of Christ. What a terrible war, what fierce attacks were made

* In Catholicæ doctrinæ mensâ juxta modum intelligentiæ sufficientes singulis epulæ apponuntur. Serm. 4, Ex. Brev.

against him within his poor heart. We are moved to pity when we read the description he gives. He tells us that he groaned as he felt his own will like a heavy chain holding him fast, and that the enemy of man kept even the power of willing shackled by a kind of cruel necessity.* He went through an agony of death in shaking himself free from his habits of vice.† Just on the verge of resolving, the old fascinations and false delights dragged him back from his purpose of amendment, and he heard low voices murmur: "Do you mean to forsake us? From this moment forth are we never, never more to be with you?"‡ But what was it which in the end, after so determined and fierce a struggle, subdued the heart of the Saint? what was it that won that heroic soul to God? The final victory was due, not to the mother with her tears, nor to Ambrose with his lofty eloquence, but to the reading of a pious book. To this it was that Almighty God reserved the glory of gaining to the Church so renowned a Doctor, destined to illuminate it by the splendour of his sublime genius and by his admirable writings. The saintly Archbishop and the fond mother were able indeed powerfully to move his soul, but pious reading alone had power to work a lasting change. For it happened that as St. Augustine was fighting with the wild tumultuous thoughts that filled his breast, he heard a voice which said to him: "Take and read." He obeyed, and taking up a book which lay near him, he read a chapter from St. Paul, and shortly after the dark clouds melted from his mind, the hardness of his heart gave way, and peace and perfect calm took possession of his spirit.§ And when once his chains were broken, and the

* Suspirabam ligatus non ferro alieno, sed meâ ferreâ voluntate. Velle meum tenebat inimicus et inde mihi catenam fecerat, et constrinxerat me. Confess., lib. viii., cap. 10.

† Quasi mortem reformidabat (voluntas mea) restringi a fluxu consuetudinis quo tabescebat in mortem. Ibid., cap. 18.

‡ Retinebant me nugæ nugarum et vanitates vanitatum antiquæ amicæ; et succutiebant vestem meam carneam et murmurabant: dimittis nos? et a momento isto non erimus tecum ultra in æternum? . . . Quas sordes suggerebant? quæ dedecora? Ibid., cap. 26.

§ Quasi luce serenitatis infusâ cordi meo, omnes dubitationis tenebræ diffugerunt. Ibid., cap. 29.

bonds of bad habits were snapped asunder, he gave himself up without reserve to God, and became the great Saint who is admired by all the world and revered upon the altars of the Church. So great is the power of pious reading to triumph over even hard hearts, to wean them from earth and make them spiritual and holy.

140. Here I might also cite the example of St. Ignatius of Loyola, who, by reading on one single occasion, and that too not out of devotion, but merely for the sake of driving away the tedium of a distressing illness, was converted from being a soldier of an earthly king, and after becoming a soldier of the King of Heaven, gathered to the same standard a goodly company of warriors. Or I might speak of St. John Colombino, who by the perusal of a pious book, though only at suggestion of his wife, and with a bad grace, felt so thorough a change of heart that he turned his back upon the world, surrendered himself entirely to God's service, and, like St. Ignatius, became the leader of a great troop of religious men, who enrolled themselves under the banner of the Crucified. But I will not pause over these and other similar examples. When I began to discuss this point, I quoted some words of St. Augustine, and with some words of the same Saint will I conclude. In the very book in which the holy Doctor relates his own conversion, he also gives an account of the conversion from worldly life to perfection, of two gentlemen attached to the Court of the Emperor Theodosius, who were led in a like manner to a better life by the perusal of a spiritual book.* Whilst the Emperor was absorbed in the games of the amphitheatre in Treves, these two gentlemen, weary of the noise and bustle of the court, strolled out into the country to breathe a calmer atmosphere. Now, as they sauntered on, wandering as chance led them, they lighted on a house where some good monks were living, and, passing the entrance-gate, they walked slowly forward, feeling a sort of fascination as they marked the poverty, simplicity, silence, and peace that reigned in the holy abode, and were never wearied with admiring the unaffected look of happiness which shone in the faces of the religious. As

* Conf., lib. viij. cap. 15.

they went along, one of the courtiers found in a monk's cell a copy of the life of St. Antony, and out of curiosity began to read it. As he read on, by little and little he felt his admiration aroused by the deeds of that holy hermit, and in course of time he was fired with desire to follow his example. Finally, he resolved to engage himself in a like course of life, and to leave the world for the sake of giving himself up unreservedly to the service of God.* Mark well, I pray you, the happy effects of pious reading. Then (continues the Saint) carried away by the ardent zeal of these holy emotions, the courtier fixed his eyes on the face of his friend, and exclaimed, "What is it that we hope to win by the labours in which we are spending our lives? Can we hope to do more than secure the friendship of Cæsar? And even in this how doubtful is our success? How many risks do we run? But if I wish to become God's friend, in the act of forming my wish, I at once gain it."† Saying this, he fell to reading again, and as he read, St. Augustine says, he felt himself deeply moved and his whole soul changed: he became conscious that the love of earth and of earthly things was departing from his heart. At length, heaving a long and deep-drawn sigh: "O my friend," he cried, "I have now broken the chain which, with its multitudinous links of petty hopes, bound me to the Imperial Court. From this moment I make up my mind to serve God alone; and that you may believe how fully I am telling the truth, this very hour, on this hallowed spot, I shall begin to put my resolve in execution. If however you do not like to follow my example, I beseech you do not interfere with my design."‡ On hearing this, the other felt his own heart respond to the holy emotions which his friend had experienced, and eagerly offered to follow him; and the two that very day, without any interval of preparation, consecrated themselves to God in that sacred cloister. These young courtiers, moreover, were affianced to two noble

* Mirari et accendi, et inter legendum meditari arripere talem vitam, et relictâ militiâ sæculari, servire Tibi. Ibid.

† Amicus autem Dei, si voluero, ecce nunc fio. Ibid.

‡ Ego jam abripui me ab illâ spe nostrâ, et Deo servire statui; et hoc ex horâ hâc, et in hoc loco aggredior. Ibid.

ladies, and though they loved them with sincere affection, yet this had no power to shake their generous resolve; nay, their example made such an impression on the hearts of their intended brides, that it led them also to consecrate themselves to God by a vow of perpetual virginity. So many souls did the reading of one spiritual book draw from a worldly life to place them in the pathway of perfection.

141. But if pious reading has such force to set poor stray worldlings upon the road of perfection, how much more efficacious will it be to make those who have already started on that way of life, run forward with great energy—never staying, never flagging in the race? St. Augustine, addressing himself to souls that are aiming at perfection and constant union with God, tells them that they must frequently betake themselves either to praying or to reading; and he gives them, moreover, the reason, because "when we pray, we speak to God; and when we read good books, God speaks to us."* St. Ambrose, instructing ecclesiastics already set apart for the service of God, insists on the same thing, and bids them, when they have ended their prayers in the church, give themselves to spiritual reading; because in prayer we discourse with Jesus Christ, and while we read, we listen to Jesus Christ speaking to our heart."† If then, prayer, as the Saints agree and as we mean to prove in the following Article, is so necessary for our progress in spirit, we must admit that spiritual reading is equally useful, seeing that for advancement in perfection it is of the like importance that we should speak to God, and that Almighty God should speak to us, and should urge us by His interior lights and the whispers of His grace to the performance of every virtue.

142. To prove how efficacious is the reading of spiritual books

* Qui vult cum Deo semper esse, frequenter debet orare et legere, nam cum oramus, ipsi cum Deo loquimur; cum vero legimus, Deus nobiscum loquitur. Serm. 12, De Tem.

† Cur non illa tempora, quibus ab ecclesia vacas, lectioni impendas? Cur non Christum revisas? Christum alloquaris? Christum audias? Illum alloquimur, cum oramus; illum audimus, cum divina legimus oracula. Lib. i., Offic., cap. 20.

to change worldly men into servants of God, I have adduced the example of a Doctor of the Holy Church. To prove the power of the same to lead those who are already faithful servants of God to higher perfection, I will take the example of another Doctor of the Church, the great St. Jerome. He tells us of himself that, when he had forsaken the pomp and pride of Rome, he withdrew to lead a hermit's life in the holy places of Palestine. Here he spent his days and nights in watching and prayer, in weeping, fasting, and doing severe penance. Yet, amid the holy rigours of a life so fervent and penitential, he had clung to one defect which greatly impeded his spiritual advancement, and this was an overweening passion for profane literature, and a kind of aversion for the reading of the sacred writings, on account of what seemed to him their unpolished style; for he attributed to the sun—as he confesses with great self-reproach—what was in very truth nothing but the fault of his own eyes.* Almighty God, meanwhile, foreseeing that without the aid of holy books the Saint would never reach that height of sanctity for which he was destined, administered a remedy, very harsh, no doubt, but well adapted to make him aware of his fault. He sent a grievous sickness which soon brought the solitary to the brink of the grave. As he was lying at the verge of death, God called him in spirit before His tribunal. The Saint being present, heard the Judge ask him who he was. He answered, unhesitatingly, "I am a Christian; I hold no other faith than Thine, my Lord, my Judge." "Thou liest," said the Judge; "thou art a Ciceronian; for where thy treasure is there thy heart is also."† He then ordered him to be severely scourged. The servant of God shrieked with pain as he felt the blows, and begged for mercy, repeating with a loud voice: *Have mercy upon me, O Lord, have mercy upon me.* Meanwhile, they who stood round the throne of that angry Judge, falling on their faces before Him, began to plead on behalf of the culprit, implored

* Si quando in me ipsum reversus prophetas legere cœpissem, sermo horrebat incultus, et quia lumen cæcis oculis non videbam, nec oculorum putabam culpam esse, sed solis. Epist. ad Eustoch.

† Et ille qui præsidebat: "Mentiris, ait: Ciceronianus es, non Christianus: ubi enim thesaurus tuus, ibi et cor tuum." Ibid.

compassion for his youth, and promised in his name that his fault should be corrected. Then St. Jerome, smarting as he was with the pain of the hard strokes that he had received, and who would gladly have pledged much greater things, began to promise and to swear with all the ardour of his soul, that never again would he open profane and worldly books, but that he would read spiritual books only. As he uttered these words he returned to his senses, to the amazement of the bystanders, who had believed him to be already deceased. The holy Doctor concludes the narration of this sad history with these words: Let no one fancy that it was an idle dream, like to those which come to cheat our minds in the dead of night. I call to witness that dread tribunal before which I lay prostrate, that it was no dream, but a true representation of a real occurrence; for when I returned to myself I found my eyes swimming with tears, and my shoulders livid and bruised with those cruel blows.* He tells us, finally, that after this warning he devoted himself to the reading of spiritual books with the same diligence and zeal which he had before bestowed upon the works of profane writers.† It was thus that Almighty God induced him to apply to that study of divine things, which was so essential to his own perfection, and destined to do so much good to the whole Christian world.

143. It should be remarked that when these things happened to St. Jerome, he was not living—as worldly people live—in utter forgetfulness of perfection, nor did he stand in need of good books to rouse his soul to some desire of self-improvement. As I have mentioned above, he was actually leading a very austere and fervent life. He says, no doubt, that he used to read with pleasure the Comedies of Plautus; but then this was only after he had spent whole nights in bitterly bewailing the sins of his past life; and it was simply and solely to give a little relief to his mind, exhausted

* Nec vero sopor ille fuerat, aut vana somnia, quibus sæpe deludimur. Testis judicium triste, quod timui: ita mihi nunquam contingat in talem incidere quæstionem. Liventes, fateor, habuisse me scapulas, plagas sensisse. Ibid.

† Et tanto me dehinc studio divina legisse, quanto antea mortalia legeram. Ibid.

by long praying, and weakened by the many tears he was constantly shedding.* Yet even all this was not enough to carry him forward in perfection, so long as he did not add to an austere life and assiduous prayer, the reading of good books. We may, then, fairly conclude that spiritual reading is an indispensable means, not only to start worldly men on the career of perfection, but to add fresh speed to those who are already on the road.

CHAPTER III.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS ON THE METHOD TO BE PURSUED IN SPIRITUAL READING, IN ORDER THAT WE MAY DRAW FROM IT THE GREATEST SPIRITUAL PROFIT.

144. FIRST suggestion. Directors must bear in mind that to make a study of spiritual books is one thing, and to read holy books spiritually is an entirely different thing. When we study, our object is to gain a knowledge of the truths we read: in our spiritual reading we aim at gaining love for these same truths, and penetrating ourselves thoroughly with them, in order, afterwards, to reduce them to practice. Study aims at enlightening the mind, spiritual reading is intended to give perfection to the will by means of pious affections, and to spur it on to put these affections into practical shape. St. Augustine says, to the same purpose: Feed your soul with the reading of the sacred books; they will furnish a wholesome repast to your spirit.† St. Bonaventure says the same: that we must provide our souls with the nourishing food of pious reading, if we would have them firm and vigorous in the performance of virtuous actions.‡ But to appreciate more fully the meaning which these holy Doctors attached to their

* Post noctium crebras vigilias, post lacrymas, quas mihi præteritorum recordatio peccatorum ex imis visceribus eruebat, Plautus sumebatur in manibus.

† Nutri animam tuam lectionibus divinis: parabis enim tibi mensam spiritualem. Lib. de Opere Monast.

‡ Lectionibus divinis est anima nutrienda. In Speculo, Par. 1, cap. 13.

remarks, we may consider, that were a man to sit down to table, and content himself with scrutinising the nature of the various dishes and with carefully inspecting their different seasonings, and were then to pronounce his judgment upon them severally, as wholesome or injurious, palatable or otherwise, he would not be eating his meal, or deriving any nourishment whatever from the dainties prepared for him. If the food is to be of service to those present at the repast, it must be lifted to the lips and subjected to the action of the teeth, tasted by the palate, transmitted to the stomach, and by the process of digestion assimilated to the system. And precisely in the same manner (as the Saints teach us) in order that the holy maxims which, in spiritual reading as at a dainty banquet, are served up for the nourishment of our souls, may have their due effect and impart spiritual life, it will never suffice to content ourselves with turning the eyes of our mind toward these truths, and then pronouncing judgment upon the style, the arrangement and division, the learning, the clearness with which such truths are set forth by the author; but we must bring them into contact with our will, that it may taste them, and dwell upon them and assimilate them, by proceeding to put them in practice. This makes St. Bernard say: Whoever sets himself to read pious books, should try not so much to acquire the meaning as the relish of the divine truths which he reads.* This will show us why so many persons, after spending half an hour, or even a good hour, at this holy repast of spiritual reading, leave off with their hearts all parched and dry, void of good desires, and dying of spiritual starvation, to use the words of Pope St. Gregory.† From this, too, we may gather why some learned men, though they have the Holy Scripture ever before their eyes, and the writings of the Fathers and Saints in their hands, for all that, have not in their hearts as much devotion and inclination for spiritual things as, possibly, some poor old woman. These men in their readings seek after nothing but the meaning, and not the relish; pluck no fruit, but leaves only; and consequently,—albeit they

* Si quis ad legendum accedat, non tam quærat scientiam, quam saporem. In Spec. Monach.

† Multi legunt, et ab ipsâ lectione jejuni sunt. Hom. 10 in Ezech.

derive from this food some solace for the mind—yet do they find in it nothing to nourish their spirit.

145. Second suggestion. In order, then, that the devout person may receive the nourishment of which we have spoken, in his spiritual reading, he must act as follows: before beginning let him raise his mind to God, and protest that he reads from no curious craving for knowledge, but from the simple desire of improvement. But as this improvement is due to supernatural light, and to a holy impulse imparted to the will, which does not spring from our own nature, but is the free gift of God's grace, he must pray to God for light and impulse. In this book, O Lord, Thy own divine words are written: it is a letter addressed to me from Heaven to make known to me Thy holy will: speak to me, then, by means of it;—to my mind by Thy illuminating grace, to my heart by Thy heavenly inspirations, and I promise to lend an attentive ear.*

146. We are told in the life of that glorious patriarch, St. Dominic, that while he was yet a novice following the Institute of the Canons Regular, he derived, from reading the Conferences of the Fathers, a great purity of heart, a profound humility, a sincere contempt of self, a special veneration for all his brethren in religion; and was by the same reading introduced to a knowledge of contemplation, and to perfection in all the virtues. But how was it that he drew so much profit from the reading of a single book? His biographer tells us the reason; namely, that the Saint set himself to read the work with the pure intention of feasting his affections upon the holy teachings which it contained, and of carrying resolutely into practice all its salutary counsels.† Hence all who would gather from spiritual books the like fruits of holy life, should set about the reading of them in the same spirit, and with the like purity of intention.

147. Third suggestion. A Director should warn his penitents

* Loquere Domine, quia audit servus tuus.

† Librum illum qui *Collationes Patrum* inscribitur, studiose legendum suscepit, deditque operam, ut rectâ intelligentiâ comprehenderet, affectu sentiret, effectu, et re ipsâ fortiter exequeretur. Didicit enim ex eo puritatem cordis, &c. Theodoricus de Appoldiâ, lib. 1, Vitæ S. Domin., cap. 4.

against reading in haste, and skimming over the words with eyes or mind; recommending them to read with attention, steadiness, and reflection, and without hurry; so that the desired result may be produced in their souls The aromatic leaves of certain plants need to be deliberately crushed with the finger before they will give out their sweet odour. And in the same way, spiritual reading should be pondered at leisure, in order that the soul may catch the rich perfume of Christian virtue.

148. For this end St. Ephrem would have the reader sometimes turn back, and go over the same passage two or three times, to enable the soul to take in the thought in its fulness. And this rule applies especially to those passages which treat of important things, and which make a deep impression on the mind of the pious reader.* Mark well the words of the Saint: "When you read, do not try how fast you can turn over the leaves." They are directed against the fault of those who, whatever book they take into their hand, devour it rather than read it, and think that they cannot get to the end of it soon enough. Their reading is like a summer-storm, which breaks out with much violence, and sweeps by with great rapidity, giving the land no time to drink in the rain, and, in consequence, doing it little or no good. Spiritual reading should be like those gentle showers which fall gently and quietly, sinking deep into the soil and fertilising the bosom of the earth. There is little use in reading much, if we do not read well and to some purpose.

149. Theodore, a physician at Constantinople, sent a large sum of money to St. Gregory the Great to be spent in ransoming the poor slaves from the cruel bondage under which they groaned. The holy Pope, in his answer, thanked the donor for his generous alms, and spoke in terms of the highest praise of his great charity towards those unfortunate men. Then he went on to find fault with Theodore, because, when he read the Holy Scriptures, he ran over the pages with a hasty and careless eye, without any warmth of devotion. And among other remarks the Pope made the follow-

* Dum legis, non studeas dumtaxat libri folia evolvere; sed non pigeat bis terque ac sæpius eundem repetere sensum, ut vim orationis intelligas. Lib. de Patient. et Consum. hujus Sæculi.

ing: "The Lord of Heaven, the King of Angels and of men, in furtherance of your salvation, condescends to write letters to you with His own hand: is it possible, then, that you can read them without emotion? What else are the Holy Scriptures than so many letters of Almighty God to us who are His poor lowly creatures?"* Directors must, therefore, understand the importance of reading pious books with due deliberation and devout attention; both for the reverence these deserve, and for the good they have power to impart.

150. Fourth suggestion. St. Bernard recommends us, in our spiritual reading, to select some pious thought to carry away with us, so that we may recall it to memory from time to time throughout the day, and by its help keep ourselves recollected in God;† just as a man, after strolling in a pleasant garden, and enjoying to the full the scented breeze and the lawns studded with beauteous plants, might make a nosegay of flowers, and take them away with him, in order to delight in their fragrance. St. Ephrem gives the same advice, and sets the matter in a clear light by a very pretty simile. He bids us observe how the bee lights on flower after flower, extracting sweet juices from them, which it carries to its little cell to form honey. And thus, we ourselves, from the multitude of thoughts, which like spiritual flowers strew our holy books, should strive to extract sweet juices to serve for remedies against the ailments of our soul.‡ Therefore let the Director suggest to his penitents, that when they have finished reading, they should thank Almighty God for the lights and graces He has given them; and then select some thought which has especially struck them, in order to ponder it during the day, and to consider it more carefully, and search into it more deeply, in their pious meditations.

151. Fifth suggestion. A Director should engage his penitents

* Imperator Cœli, Dominus Angelorum et hominum, pro vitâ tuâ tibi epistolas suas transmisit, et tu illas ardenter legere negligis? Quid est enim Scriptura Sacra, nisi quædam epistola Omnipotentis Dei ad creaturam suam? Lib. iv., Epist. 31.

† Ad Fratres de Monte Dei.

‡ Si lectioni incumbas, instar sapientis apiculæ, mel ex floribus sibi colligentis, fructum ex iis, quæ legis, pro animi mede desumito. De Rectâ Vivendi Ratione, cap. 36.

to read books that will do them good and are suited to their wants. Books that will do them good; for some books are of great bulk but of small substance, whilst others are better adapted for feeding the intellect than for working upon the will. Books that are suited to their wants; for some books are useful to beginners, others to proficients, and others again to those who are rapidly gaining the lofty heights of perfection. Some books are good for those whose ruling or predominant passion is of one kind, and some for those who are under the sway of another passion. Some persons are most impressed by historical works, which therefore are the most useful to them; doctrinal treatises suit others better, and therefore succeed better with them. The Director will do well then, to point out to each the books proper for him to read. But most of all—and I have insisted upon this above—he must try to persuade all to make this reading with great attention and devotion, and desire of improvement; for, if they read in this spirit, the Holy Ghost will help them with His illuminating grace, and they will reap great fruit;* as St. John Chrysostom assures us.

ARTICLE V.

Fourth means of acquiring perfection. Meditation on the maxims of our faith.

CHAPTER I.

THAT MEDITATION IS A MEANS OF GREAT IMPORTANCE FOR THE KEEPING OF GOD'S COMMANDMENTS IN THEIR SUBSTANCE, AND ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY FOR THEIR PERFECT OBSERVANCE.

152. In the ladder which St. Bernard constructed for spiritual persons who are desirous of reaching to the summit of perfection,

* Igitur lectioni vacemus cum magnâ pietate et attentione, ut possimus a Spiritu Sancto ad scriptorum intelligentiam duci, et multum inde fructum percipere. Homil. 35 in Genes.

the first step (as we saw at the beginning of the preceding Article) is the reading of good books, and the second is meditation on the maxims of our faith; for from the one step we mount in due course to the other. When reading pious books, the soul fills itself with certain of the divine truths, and then afterwards thinks them over at the foot of the Crucifix, ponders them deeply, and by the help of this pondering, becomes enkindled with the flame of holy feelings, and with the desires of higher perfection. And thus it is that from reading we pass very naturally to meditation, in which our knowledge of revealed truths deepens and is made more real, and the movement of the will becomes more fixed and fervent. Having then surmounted the first step, we mean throughout the whole of this Article to take our stand upon the second, and to show how important and even essential it is to mount thus far, in order that we may find the support we need for the attainment of that perfection to which we aspire with our hopes.

153. Before however going any further, we must observe that mental prayer is divided into meditation and contemplation. Meditation consists in certain acts of the mind when it reasons, which acts tend to elicit various pious emotions. Contemplation consists in the simple, steady gaze of the intellect, in admiration and sweet love of some divine truth. Of mental prayer, when it passes into contemplation—although in reality it belongs to the fourth step of St. Bernard's ladder—we have nothing to say in the present work; because, inasmuch as it is the mere and strict contemplation of divine things, it is the object of Mystic Theology. I shall treat of mental prayer only in so far as it is meditation, considered from its practical side. I append this limitation, because a supernatural truth can be the subject of our meditations in two ways, speculatively and practically. Our meditation is speculative, when we apply the powers of our mind to some article of our faith, with no other design than to arrive at the truth, as scholastic theologians do when they inquire into the being and attributes of God, the incarnation of the Divine Word, the nature of grace, and other such subjects, in which they have no other view than to gain or communicate knowledge. We are not speaking of this method now, for it does not concern

us. The meditation we now have to do with, is of the second kind, in which we apply the powers of our mind to some principle of faith, in order to move our will to feelings that correspond to it. And it is of this meditation that we propose to treat in this place, since it is really a conducive means for securing the moral and supernatural perfection of Christian souls; and this is the one sole object of our treatise. In this first Chapter I shall try to prevail upon my reader to apply to this holy exercise of meditation, by showing him that meditation such as practically influences our character and conduct, is a most important aid to the observance of the divine law in its substance, and is indispensably required for its perfect observance.

154. It is a remark commonly enough made, that a large proportion of Christians transgress the law of God without restraint and lead licentious lives, because faith has become extinct in their souls; that everywhere interest reigns supreme; that ambition lords it over all; and that impurity, passing the bounds of all decency, rages at will over every meadow, trampling down every flower: all because the faithful no longer believe. But in reality, I do not think that this is the cause of all the evil; for, as far as the substance goes, there is faith: and if we sound the mind and heart of any Catholic, no matter how loose his life may be, we shall find that there is not one article of our faith, though ever so abstruse or difficult, which he does not firmly hold. The whole ruin of souls then, which we deplore in the Catholic Church, proceeds, not from want of faith, but from want of thought upon the truths taught by faith. No one principle of faith meets with disbelief, but then, no one principle of faith meets with consideration nowadays among worldlings; and therefore it is that, whilst they believe, they live as though they did not believe: because whether we do not believe in Catholic truths, or do not give them any serious thought, our will is equally, in either case, disinclined to good, and prone to evil. For, in the one case as in the other, it is removed from the presence of those objects which have power to hold it back from what is bad, and to spur it on to what is good.

155. But this truth must be sifted to the bottom, so as to be

made clear and evident to the mind of each one of our pious readers. Our will, as philosophy teaches, is a blind power which cannot have its affections excited, unless the intellect goes before, shedding the light of its perceptions. A condemned felon, before he receives the gloomy tidings of the sentence of death that has been passed upon him, is not cast down or panic-stricken, nor does he burst into sobs and groans; because the great evil which is already hanging over his head has not yet been brought home to him by his understanding. So, too, with a person who has lately been raised to some high post of honour, and yet feels no flush of joy until he receives tidings of the glad event; because his understanding has not as yet presented to the will the picture of his good fortune. But when the emotions of our will begin to bestir themselves, they are, as a general rule, measured by the pictures which the mind paints of the various objects. If the intellect presents to the will some object worthy of love, straightway the will is moved to embrace it; if something hateful, then the will is moved to fly from it with horror. If the intellect points out evils threatening in the distance, the will at once feels fear; if near at hand, the will at once feels sadness. If the intellect makes some object seem to harmonise with our nature, the will is forthwith determined to seek after it; if again, it represents something as out of harmony with our being, no resolution is taken by the will. Thus the affections of our will, generally speaking, take their form from the reflections made by our understanding upon any given present object. If this be so, what does it matter, I ask, or how does it avail us, that the truths of our faith have in themselves a sovereign efficacy to remove from us every vice, to keep us far from every mortal sin; if the Christian, believing in these truths, does not fix his mind upon them, never gives them any real attention, never brings them into contact with his will, by seriously pondering over them? Assuredly, so long as they are thus forgotten, they never can detach the will from sin, though of themselves they have ample power to produce this effect. A fire can burn wood when it is perfectly dry: but unless the fire be brought near, it will never cause the wood to burn. Exactly in the same manner the truths of faith, both in their terrors and their charms

have full power to wean our will, ill-disposed as it may be, from every kind of mortal sin; but if we never bring them by the aid of serious reflection to act upon the will, they will never work such an effect upon it. There is a hell, and no Catholic thinks of calling it into doubt: but if no one ever turns his thoughts upon hell, to try to move himself to holy fear, it might as well not exist at all. Death must come to all of us; no Catholic but expects to be mowed down by the stroke of its fatal scythe: but if people never think of death, to try to wean themselves from the love of perishable things, it is just as if no such thing were coming. Mortal sin is the most fearful monster that has ever appeared in the world; and, once more, you will not find a Catholic who does not acknowledge as much; but if sin be never contemplated under its true form, in order that a feeling of dread and hate of it may be impressed upon our hearts, sin might as well have nothing hideous about it. Whence I infer, that the ruin of us Christians, comes not from disbelieving, but from not reflecting, not meditating, upon what we do believe. And this is what the prophet Jeremias declares to us: *with desolation is all the land made desolate;** every flower of virtue is plucked up by the roots, and nothing is to be seen growing on all sides but the thistles and thorns of sin and iniquity. What then must be the cause of so wide-spread an evil? Must we account for it by saying that the true faith has been entirely banished from the world? Certainly not. The cause is simply this, that the serious thought and the careful study of the truths of faith has been banished; *because there is no one that considereth in the heart.* Few indeed are they who enter into themselves and ponder attentively how things stand in the sight of God, and how altogether different they are from what they seem to the feeble eyes of this our body.

156. Let us then confess the truth. What Christian would dare to commit a mortal sin, if every day he were to think of the strict account which sometime he will have to give before the awful tribunal of God, his judge; or of the eternal joys which he forfeits, and of the terrible and never-ending

* Desolatione desolata est omnis terra, quia nullus est qui recogitet corde. Jerem. c. xii. 12.

pains which he deserves, by one single mortal sin? Who would ever fall into mortal sin if he were to reflect upon the infinite majesty and loveliness of the God he outrages so grievously? or of the insults, the injuries, the contumely, the sorrows, the torments, the shameful death to which the same great God submitted Himself in hatred of such sin? I might say the same of a thousand other motives suggested by our holy faith: motives which have the fullest power to hold our will in allegiance, and keep it from transgressing the commandments of the divine law. It is, then, from not meditating upon things which are indeed only known too well and which are believed too unmistakably, that all evil comes into the world. So true is this, that a single meditation, even reluctantly undertaken and with a bad grace, has sometimes sufficed to lead back to the right road of virtue a person that had gone astray. From numberless instances I will select one by which this truth may be made clear, and by which all the teaching lately propounded may be confirmed by experience.

157. Sister Mary Bonaventure, a nun in the well-known convent of Torre de' Specchi in Rome, had been endowed by God with all the gifts fitted to adorn, I should say the grand lady of fashion that she was, rather than the good religious that she professed to be: for to nobility of birth, to personal beauty, to quickness of wit and charm of manner, together with elevation of mind, she added the lustre of learning acquired by a well-directed and wide study of literature. But alas! she failed to join to all these gifts of nature those which more properly belong to a nun—recollection, devotion, piety, observance of rule; so all her treasures lay unused and unhonoured, like jewels without their setting. It happened that when the community were anxious to go into retreat for some days, to meditate on the chief truths of faith in the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, Sister Bonaventure, as one entirely estranged from all such devotional exercises, made merry about the whole affair, turning it into joke, and bidding them to go into retreat by all means, and to betake themselves to the wilderness. "For me," she said, "it is enough to have made myself a nun; I have no mind to make myself a hermit. Get

yourselves canonised; spend your time in ecstasies, disembodied spirits that you are! I, who am made of flesh and blood, choose to remain on earth, and to busy myself with my ordinary occupations." However, by the inspiration of God she went to the first meditation given, which was upon the end for which man had been created by God; and with all the attention of her mind she set herself to think out this great truth. So deep was the impression made upon her soul by this meditation, that she sought out her Director at once, and kneeling at his feet, uttered these few but weighty words: "Father, it will not do to trifle with God any longer. I have now clearly learnt what that is in me which excites the grievous displeasure of Almighty God and what it is that He demands of me. I mean to make myself a Saint. But that is saying too little. I mean to make myself a great Saint, and to make myself one without further delay." She would have said more, but was forced to give outlet to her tears. She spoke no more with her lips, but she began to speak by her actions: withdrawing to her own room, she wrote out, and laid at the foot of the Crucifix, an unreserved offering of her whole self. Then she put away all her vain ornaments, she banished from her room whatever was superfluous, and gave herself up to a recollected, devout, mortified, exemplary and penitential life, in which she persevered till the time of her death.* Now, I have one question to ask. Before this nun made that meditation, did she or did she not know that man had been created only to serve God? Who can have a doubt on the matter? Why, this is an article of faith known to every child that has just arrived at the use of reason. How happened it then, that this great truth was for so many years powerless to set that nun free from a tepidity so ruinous, and to restore her to the pathway of perfection? The reason is obvious to any one. It was because she had never before reflected seriously upon the truth; never made it the subject of careful meditation. If, therefore, people of the world would every day direct their thoughts to some single one of all those many truths of Christianity, which they do indeed hold with unwavering faith, we should no

* Lancisius. Opusc. vi., cap. 2.

longer see so much licentiousness in their manner of living, nor so much depravity in their moral character. And hence it seems to me the honest truth, that all the desolation of spirit which we notice amongst persons living a worldly life, has its origin in lack of meditation : *because there is no one that considereth in the heart.*

158. Now if meditation be so important an aid to the keeping of God's law in the substance of its precepts, we must own in addition that it is altogether indispensable for keeping that law in the perfection of its precepts and its counsels ; considering how much harder it is to do this, and how painful a struggle it involves. But to tread upon safe ground in a matter of such moment, we must first make good this truth, that true Christian perfection consists in devotion to God ; understanding devotion, of course, in the sense intended by Saint Thomas of Aquin, not in the sense it more commonly bears among Catholics. Most are apt to suppose that devotion is only a sort of sensible emotion, or tenderness of feeling, experienced by spiritual people at their prayers. But in good truth they err greatly who think thus : both because all this may be merely the effect of a yielding and soft character, which readily takes pleasing impressions from what is presented to the mind : and because, even where such feelings spring from grace, they still are but the accidents, and by no means the substance, of devotion. Devotion, St. Thomas says—and we shall see the full explanation in its proper place—consists in a readiness of will to carry out all that belongs to obeying, serving, and pleasing God. In this readiness of the will to perform acts of service and love, however devoid they may be of sensible fervour, the whole substance of real devotion really consists. Nor is this at variance with what we laid down in the beginning of this treatise, namely, that perfection consists in charity ; for this same charity is incomplete if it be not united to devotion : I mean incomplete, if it be not prompt to love the Sovereign Good, prompt to execute His will in all things, prompt to yield Him homage, prompt to pay Him worship, prompt to give Him every pledge of holy love.

159. Having now laid the foundation, I assert with the Angelic Doctor that in order to the acquisition of this devotion, which

gives birth to an eager and active charity (and consequently to perfection), meditation is an essential means. Here are the words of St. Thomas himself: "To produce devotion there must necessarily be meditation, as the instrumental and remote cause; inasmuch as man, by means of meditation, conceives a certain readiness of will to consecrate himself entirely to the service of God. And this for two reasons: First, because he who meditates much, considers how great is the goodness of God, and how countless the benefits which the Almighty has bestowed upon him: secondly, because he who meditates much, has his attention called to his own defects, and dwells upon the thought of his own miseries. By the consideration of God's goodness and benefits, there is lighted up in the hearts of all who meditate, that holy love which wakes devotion and renders them alert and active in everything that concerns the service of God. By the knowledge of their own weaknesses all presumption is kept away and humility is engendered,—that lowly opinion of self, I mean, which makes us submissive to God, and prepares us to receive the gift of holy love, and to attain true devotion to the Almighty.* Thus charity, eager and active, is found to be the proximate, and meditation the remote, cause of devotion. This teaching of the Angel of the Schools rests upon another maxim of St. Augustine, or at least of some writer who goes by his name, which no way differs from the former:—"Of meditation devotion is born; for by the consideration of our own miseries, humility and compunction are produced in our souls: by the consideration of God's goodness there is begotten within us a feeling of piety and love, which (as St. Thomas

* Necesse est, quod meditatio sit devotionis causa, in quantum, scilicet, homo per meditationem concipit, quod se tradat divino obsequio; ad quod quidem inducit duplex consideratio: una quidem, quæ est ex parte divinæ bonitatis, et beneficiorum ipsius, secundum illud Psalmi 62: *Mihi adhærere Deo bonum est, et ponere in Domino Deo spem meam;* et hæc consideratio excitat dilectionem, quæ est proxima devotionis causa. Alia vero ex parte hominis considerantis suos defectus, ex quibus indiget ut Deo innitatur, secundum illud Psalmi 120: *Levavi oculos meos in montes, unde veniet auxilium mihi: Auxilium meum a Domino, qui fecit cœlum et terram.* Et hæc consideratio excludit præsumptionem, per quam aliquis impeditur ne Deo se subjiciat, dum sure virtuti innititur. 2, 2, q. 82, art. 3, in corp.

tells us, and reason itself shows) makes easy to us whatever is connected with the service of God."* From this we gather demonstrably that for obtaining a humble knowledge of ourselves, for arriving at great love of God, and readiness to serve Him in the practice of solid virtues,—in one word, for acquiring true devotion, which is the fulfilling of perfect charity and of all the virtues, the use of holy meditation is absolutely necessary.

160. This is so true that Cajetan, commenting upon the above quoted passage of the Angelic Doctor, does not hesitate to say that spiritual persons, whether in religion or in the world, who do not devote a fixed time every day to meditating upon some truth of faith, to the exclusion of an unwise accumulation of vocal prayers to which they may be addicted, do not deserve to be called, far less to be thought in reality to be, religious or spiritual persons. He founds this assertion upon the teaching of St. Thomas, cited above, that meditation is the cause on which depends the acquirement of devotion, and, as a consequence, of every other virtue. So that, to hope for perfection without practising meditation, is the same thing, in his idea, as to look for an effect without its cause, an end without the means; or, to use his very words, to make sure of arriving in port without setting sail and leaving land.†

161. And lest the reader should be tempted to think that the words of this great theologian are somewhat exaggerated, he must know that the ancient Fathers entertained the same opinion of the necessity which all those are under who strive after perfection, of consecrating some time, at least, every day, to the

* Meditatio parit scientiam, scientia compunctionem, compunctio devotionem, devotio perficit orationem. . . . Devotio est pius et humilis affectus in Deum; humilis ex conscientiâ infirmitatis propriæ, pius ex consideratione divinæ clementiæ. In Lib. de Spir. et Animâ, cap. 50.

† Ex hujusmodi namque meditationibus, quæ quotidianæ esse debent religiosis et spiritualibus personis, omisso vocalium orationum multiloquio, devotio, aliæque consequenter gignuntur virtutes: nec religiosi, aut religiosæ, seu spiritalis etiam nomine vocari potest, qui saltem semel in die ad hujusmodi se non transfert. Quomodo namque effectus absque causâ, finis absque medio, insularis portus absque navigatione haberi nequit; sic religio in actu absque frequentibus actibus harum causarum, mediorum, ac vehiculorum.

practice of holy meditation. St. Jerome, writing to Celantia, tells her that she must put aside in her palace some inner rooms, to which, as to some haven of repose, she can every day betake herself, and escape from the tossing waves of household cares, there, with the consideration of eternal truths, she is to soothe her troubled soul and restore it to deep calm; and there also by the light of meditation, she has to settle with herself what line of conduct to adopt with the members of her household in various contingencies, that being thus helped, she may go through her daily duties with all fitting perfection.*

162. An explanation may now be given of two important facts: the first, that our Blessed Lord often withdrew all alone to some high mountain, and there, at the dead hour of night, gave Himself to the contemplation of heavenly things.† What need had He of this retirement, this silence and solitude? For even while He was yet a mortal man, He enjoyed the Beatific Vision, and with one single glance of His mind could take in all the power and truth of God. Most certainly He could have had no need for Himself; for us, however, He had need. Yes, it must have been that we might understand how great is the want we have of withdrawing, either by day or by night, to some lonely place, to meditate on those eternal truths which do not manifest themselves to us unless we take the pains to think of them. The second fact is, that the Saints were much given to the practice of meditation; for we shall more easily find in history a soldier unaccustomed to the use of his weapons, than a holy Confessor unused to the meditation or the contemplation of supernatural and heavenly things. In the Life of St. Bernardine of

* Ita habeto sollicitudinem domus, ut aliquam tamen vacationem animæ tribuas. Eligatur tibi opportunus et aliquantum a familiæ strepitu remotus locus, in quem veluti in portum, quasi ex multâ tempestate curarum te recipias, et excitatos fori cogitationum fluctus secreti tranquillitate componas. Tantum sit divinæ legis studium, tam crebræ cogitationum vices, tam firma et pressa de futuris cogitatio, ut reliqui temporis occupationes facile hâc vacatione compenses. Nec hoc ideo dico, quod te retraham a tuis; immo id agimus, ut ibi discas, ibique mediteris, qualem tuis præbere te debeas.

† Ascendit in montem solus orare. Exiit in montem orare et erat pernoctans in oratione Dei. Matth. xiv. 23; vi. 12.

Sienna we read that he was so scrupulous in every day spending some time with God in holy and fruitful contemplation, that at the stated time he would let no one come to see him, and was like a man who did not belong to this world.* I am still more struck by the high esteem of mental prayer which made the learned Father Suarez often say, that sooner than forego one hour of his accustomed meditations, he would gladly renounce all his learning, though gained at the cost of such deep study. These great servants of God had fully mastered the grand idea of St. Thomas, that from meditation, as from its own fountain-head, must spring that true devotion which has power to make us prompt to serve, and in all things to seek to please, our good and loving God. And therefore they were no less scrupulously exact in the performance of it, than they were resolute never to omit their wonted practice. That man truly may give up all hope of making progress in Christian perfection who neglects, or does not take the trouble to use this necessary means of advance in Christian holiness.

163. It should be observed, however, that when, upon the authority of the Angelic Doctor, I lay down the principle that meditation is absolutely necessary for the attainment of perfection, I by no means wish to say that this necessity exists in every case, or that there is, in the language of the schools, any absolute necessity, whether physical or metaphysical; because I am of opinion that illiterate persons, incapable of working out a train of thought for themselves, are assisted by Almighty God, either through the instrumentality of spiritual reading, if they can read, or of vocal prayer practised at greater length than is usual. By these means, I feel sure, God communicates to them those interior lights and impulses which make them eager to serve Him and to do His will. All I mean to say is, that meditation is of mere moral necessity, and for those only who are able to use it. Of these alone is it true that it is most difficult and morally impossible to acquire perfection without the daily use of meditation.

* Quotidie una hora vacabat suæ devotioni, acque interim nulli patebat accessus, neque principi, neque regi, sed cogebat exspectare omnes. Surius in Vitâ, cap. 31.

CHAPTER II.

PREPARATION FOR MEDITATION.

164. THERE are two kinds of preparation which devout persons should ordinarily make before meditating: of these one is *remote*, and consists in having our passions under control, and preserving purity of heart and interior recollection in the midst of exterior and distracting occupations. Of this, however, we have not to speak at present, for it will form the subject of several Articles in the course of our work. The other kind of preparation is *immediate*, and consists of certain acts by which a person predisposes himself at the beginning of the meditation to make it well. For, if the laws of prudence will not allow us to undertake any great enterprise without first making due preparation; how much less right have we to enter upon familiar intercourse with God in meditation, without disposing ourselves beforehand by fitting preparation, considering that it is a matter of so high importance? And if no subject could be found so devoid of courtesy that, before seeking audience of his king, he would not make himself neat and clean, and pay minute attention to his dress, in order to make a creditable appearance before his Sovereign; how much more should we not always, when seeking audience with the King of Heaven and Earth, and about to spend some time with Him in familiar conversation, previously deck and trim our soul with various acts of virtue, so to become pleasing in the eyes of the Divine Majesty? And this the more because, if we usher ourselves into God's presence without the due preparation, we cannot hope to win from the Almighty the aid we need for the good success of our meditations: rather should we seem to be tempting God, and to be guilty of an act of temerity.* Of this immediate preparation, therefore, which must always be made at the beginning of meditation, I will speak in this Chapter, setting forth the three acts of which it consists; namely: first, putting

* Ante orationem præpara animam tuam, et noli esse quasi homo qui tentat Deum. Ecclus. xviij. 23.

ourselves in the presence of God; secondly, imploring His help; thirdly, making the "composition of place," according to the particular mysteries proposed for meditation. Let us begin with the first of these.

165. The putting ourselves in the presence of God consists in making an act of faith that Almighty God is present to us, seeing us and watching us, not only as to our external posture, but also as to the interior movements of our mind and heart. This act of the presence of God may be assisted by some material and sensible image, to give a lively idea of it; though it can also be made without any such gross imaginings of our soul. This second manner of putting ourselves in God's presence has place when we make an act of faith that God is present indeed, but without conceiving of Him under any bodily shape or appearance, and only under the general notion of the Infinite Good, the Infinite Love, the Infinite Greatness, the Infinite Beauty, the Infinite Majesty, which we know to be surrounding us on every side, penetrating our inmost being, as a sponge plunged into the sea is soaked through and through and enveloped on all sides with water. This way of conceiving the presence of God is more perfect and secure, because it addresses itself more directly to the intellect, and is founded on faith alone. It belongs, therefore, to such as are already somewhat versed in the art of meditating. It addresses itself, I have said, to the intellect: and yet in reality this conception of God, though it be so very general and free from material images, is not, for all that, quite unaccompanied by some kind of phantasms; for our intellect, so long as it is tied down by this wretched body, cannot exercise its own spiritual acts without some concurrent working of the imaginative faculty; (if, that is, we except the highest kind of contemplation, which does not enter into our present subject, and must not be treated of now): still, the imagery which finds place in such a conception of the presence of God is far from being of a gross and material kind, and is less out of harmony with the divine object itself.

166. The first mode of picturing to ourselves the presence of God comes into use when, at the very outset of our prayer, the mind represents Almighty God under some material and bodily

shape: as for instance under the form of unclouded light, which, pervades every part of the universe, brightening and vivifying all things with its radiance: or as He is seen in heaven, seated on a dazzling throne of glory encircled by the Angelic Hosts; or under some similar representation. The idea of the presence of God, formed in this manner by the aid of the imagination, conduces much to excite a feeling of reverence and awe, and of humble self-recollection. For when we poor wretched mortals see ourselves, who lie like reptiles all the days of our lives in the marshy waste of this earth, suddenly standing before the throne of God's majesty in the presence of the angels of the whole court of heaven, we cannot choose but feel a certain reverential fear and deep humility, which help much to fix our attention during our meditation.

167. This act of the presence of God, as conceived by the aid of the imagination, though it be very good and useful, is notwithstanding less perfect than the other, which rests upon faith alone; both because it has less of the action of the intellect, and because it is farther from the truth in its mode of representing the object and is more exposed to illusion. Still, St. Augustine is of opinion that for beginners and imperfect souls, who, on the one hand, cannot take in the idea of a spiritual and incorporeal essence in God, and are, on the other hand, very sensible to the impressions of exterior beauty, it is not a bad plan to picture the divine presence under some corporeal shape: and instead of representing God as on earth, to imagine Him in heaven, high-throned in His majesty and glory.* And therefore, should the Director perceive that, from the thought of the presence of God as conceived with the aid of some sensible image, a penitent (especially if a beginner) is moved to submission, reverence, and recollection of soul, he may recommend it to him as a useful practice.

168. He should, however, tell the penitent to correct these

* Convenit etiam gradibus religionis et plurimum expedit, ut omnium sensibus et parvulorum et magnorum bene sentiatur de Deo; et ideo, qui visibilibus adhuc pulchritudinibus dediti sunt, nec possunt aliquid incorporeum cogitare, quoniam necesse est ut cœlum præferant terræ, tolerabilior est opinio eorum, si Deum, quem adhuc corporaliter cogitant, in cœlo potius credant esse quam in terrâ. De Serm. Dom. in Monte, lib. ij., cap. 5.

imaginations as soon as they have produced the desired effect, by considering within himself how God is a Being of majesty, beauty, and power, far surpassing anything which he has been able to picture to himself by any poor endeavours of his mind. And two reasons may be adduced for this. The first, because the Director will thus enhance his penitent's opinion and esteem of the greatness of God, and will strengthen his feelings of interior reverence and compunction. The second, because by this counsel penitents will avoid the error of the Anthropomorphite heretics, which entrapped many monks in ancient times, and from which even now ignorant people are not safe—the error, namely, of giving to God a certain form and figure; a thing altogether incompatible with that most pure essence which belongs to our great God: as is well remarked by Cassian.*

169. I must be allowed to mention here what the same Cassian relates of Serapion, a monk of consummate virtue, and very highly esteemed among the ancient Fathers of his time; for the anecdote is calculated to make Directors very cautious.† This Serapion was a great servant of God, and it was through pure simplicity and ignorance that he fell into the above-named error. Believing that Almighty God was like material things, and had a definite shape, the image he had formed of the Almighty was ever before him, deeply graven upon his soul. The erroneous notion of giving God a shape had spread widely among the monasteries of Egypt, and neither the letters of the Patriarch of Alexandria, nor the admonition of Paphnutius, who was both monk and priest, were able to remove it from Serapion's mind. But in the end, Almighty God, moved to pity by the fifty years of austere and holy life passed in those deserts, caused Serapion to surrender to the arguments of a monk named Phosimus, acknowledge his error, and retract it in presence of the other monks. Whilst all, prostrate

* Incomprehensibilem et ineffabilem veri Numinis majestatem sub circumscriptione alicujus æstimant imaginis adorandam, nihil se tenere credentes, si propositam non habuerint imaginem quamdam, quam in supplicatione positi jugiter interpellent, eamque circumferant mente, et oculis teneant semper affixam. Coll. x., cap. 4.

† Ibid., cap. 2.

in prayer, were thanking God that a man of such high virtue had come at last to recognise, and sincerely put away from his mind, this false notion, Serapion too joined with them; but not finding God, as before, in his prayer, deprived as it now was of those corporeal images under which he had been used to represent the Divinity, he broke into affectionate complaint, and sighing deeply, cried out before them all: "Woe is me! they have taken away my God; I am left without support; I have no one to cling to in my prayer; I know not Whom I must adore, nor to Whom my petitions are to be addressed."* From which we may most clearly perceive that the servant of God gave firm credence to those imaginations by which he pictured God quite other than what He really is, and was strongly attached to the feelings of sensible devotion which sprang from those fanciful creations of his brain. Hence let the Director hold fast the truth, that it is safer to establish the presence of God by simple acts of faith; and that if recourse be had to some sensible image to serve as a support to the mind and awaken in the heart a feeling of reverence for God, this should afterwards be corrected in the manner above mentioned. After steeping ourselves in an atmosphere of faith, we should next prostrate ourselves before God in an act of deep adoration; and it were well and wise to add an act of contrition for clearing away every stain and acquiring grace and favour in the sight of the All-Holy.

170. Placed in the presence of God, and having made an act of profound adoration, the devout soul should now proceed to beg, in fervent and humble prayer, light to penetrate deeply the truths to be considered, and a corresponding grace to move the will.† This should be done without fail at the commencement of every meditation; for it is essential to the good success of the prayer. The reason need not be sought far; because

* Heu me miserum! tulerunt a me Deum, et quem nunc teneam non habeo; vel quem adorem, aut interpellem jam nescio.

† Loquere Domine, qui audit servus tuus. 2 Reg., iij. 9. Anima mea sicut terra sine aquâ tibi. Velociter exaudi me Domine. Ps. clxij. 6, 7

Veni Sancte Spiritus,
Et emitte cœlitus,
Lucis tuæ radium.

although meditation requires industry on our part in examining into the subject and reasoning upon it, still the effect of meditating depends upon God's grace, which gives light to the mind and warmth to the heart. And in fact, experience teaches us that sometimes an untaught girl will make a better meditation than a theologian of high mental powers, simply because God's grace works more powerfully upon her soul than upon his. Nor is there any other way of winning this grace than to ask it with great humility and much faith. Almighty God is easily gained over by humble and trustful prayer to grant His help in great abundance.

171. Lastly, the composition of place must be formed in the mind. If the mystery proposed for meditation contain truths that fall under the senses, as in the life and sufferings of our Saviour, or in the great truths of Death, Judgment, Hell, Eternity, and the like; these things should be pictured to the mind as though we saw them present, and were in the midst of them, looking upon them as they actually did happen or will one day happen. To this vivid representation of the different mysteries, St. Bonaventure ascribes a large share of the good to be gained from meditation on these subjects. "If," he says, "you would derive much fruit from the words and actions of Jesus Christ, lay aside all thought of worldly cares, and think of Him as if really present before you; as though with your ears you heard Him speaking, with your eyes beheld Him labouring or suffering for love of you; and with much feeling hold long and loving converse with Him."* The Saint lays so much stress upon these representations, that in another place he does not hesitate to say that on these depends in some sort all the good effect of our meditations.† It should be remarked, however,

* Tu si ex his, quæ per Dominum Jesum dicta et facta narrantur, fructum sumere cupis; ita te præsentem exhibeas, ac si tuis auribus et oculis ea videres, toto mentis affectu, diligenter, delectabiliter et morose, omnibus aliis curis et sollicitudinibus tunc omissis. In Prolog. Medit. Vitæ Christi.

† Rem per Dominum Jesum Christum gestam, vel dictam ante oculos mentis ponas, ut cum eo converseris, et familiaris fias: nam in hoc videtur haberi major dulcedo, et devotio efficacior, et quasi totus fructus meditationis consistere. Idem, in Medit., cap. 18.

that beginners must dwell upon these representations more than proficients or the perfect; because beginners have less understanding of holy things, and consequently more need of help from the imagination to fix their thoughts and to excite warmth of feeling towards these sacred objects. But the more advanced, who can use their minds with greater freedom and fulness, after having spent a short time in forming some such image, may pass at once to loftier considerations, and to acts of the will which are more pure and more perfect.

172. But if the subjects for meditation be some truths apart from all material things, as for example, the goodness of God, His beauty, His greatness, &c.; or the excellence and loveliness of virtue, and the like; it will then be better not to construct such sensible images, which would be too far from the truth—exception must be made, however, even here for the case of beginners, who are so material in all things that concern the spirit that they cannot dispense with something material on which to rest their thoughts—but we should proceed to discuss the matter by the double light of our understanding and our faith. On the other hand, the more perfect, on noticing, as the meditation advances, that their soul is absorbed in recollection, must divest themselves, as St. Gregory the Great tells us, as far as ever they can, of all sensible images and phantasms of the mind, for fear of impeding the action of unmixed intelligence and love.*

* Perfectam scilicet animam ista compunctio afficere familiarius solet, quâ omnes imaginationes corporeas insolenter sibi obviantes discutit, et cordis oculos figere in ipso radio incircumscriptæ lucis intendit. Has quippe corporalium figurarum species, ad se intus ex infirmitate corporis traxit. Sed perfecte compuncta hic summopere vigilat, ne cum veritatem quærit, eam imaginatio circumscriptæ visionis illudat; cunctasque obviantes imagines respuit. Moral. Lib. xxiij. cap. 13.

CHAPTER III.

THE PORTION OF MEDITATION WHICH IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWS THE PREPARATION.

173. After the three preparatory acts above explained have been duly performed, the next thing is to begin the meditation itself, which should have been thought over beforehand and arranged under several heads or points. If this has not been done, the subject-matter should at least be kept before the eyes in some book in which it is developed, and it should be carefully perused and pondered. This method of meditating is simply the applying the two powers of our soul, the intellect and the will, to the mystery or truth proposed for consideration. As soon as a mystery, or a principle of faith, has been presented to the imagination, after the manner mentioned above, the person meditating should endeavour to master some truth of religion, and to this end should discourse upon it with his mind, now reflecting upon it, now dwelling upon it with continuous thought, now making use of comparisons, similes, and examples, till the soul have realised the truth in a lively manner, and we have become thoroughly convinced of its importance: for St. Augustine tells us that "to meditate is nothing but to examine carefully into some hidden truth."* It must be observed, moreover, that our reasonings and reflections ought not to be dry and speculative, and directed to obtaining a simple understanding of the truth; but rather they should be practical, calculated to rouse the will, and to fire it with the love of God and of solid virtue. Otherwise, we shall not be meditating, but studying; and we shall succeed, possibly enough, in knowing the meaning of the truths of our faith, but not in regulating our conduct in harmony with them: we shall come to the knowledge of God, if you will, but certainly not to His fear or love. To sum up: all the reasoning and reflection which we employ in meditation should be

* Meditatio est occultæ veritatis studiosa investigatio. Lib. De Spir. et Animâ, cap. 30.

of such a nature as to move the will toward the sacred object placed before us, and to make it approach so near as that we shall become enamoured of it. As St. Augustine says in the passage already quoted, "Meditation should have force to make the spirit leap up to God, and to draw it so thoroughly from earth that God may Himself come down and set it all on fire with the inspirations of His grace.* In this manner holy David used to meditate, and therefore he could say that "In his meditations his heart was kindled with the fire of love."†

174. When the mind has deeply penetrated and fully persuaded itself of the truth proposed for its consideration, the will, as a consequence, is moved and softened; this is the time for giving free play to the affections of the heart, which form the entire fruit of holy meditation. These affections are as various as the subjects which we can choose for meditation: they may take the form of repentance, grief, hatred, loathing, gratitude, shame, self-contempt: of fear, love, desire, gladness, joy, pity, resolves, petitions, thankful acknowledgments, and the like. The affections however, which (as most conducive to reformation of life and self-improvement) should never be omitted, unless in exceptional cases, are, the recognition of our past sins, accompanied by repentance and humiliation; firm purpose of amendment for the time to come; and prayers to obtain of God grace to carry out these purposes.

175. We can make all this clear by a practical illustration. We will suppose that a person wishes to meditate on the scourging of our Saviour, and that the fruit he desires to obtain is patience in trouble and meekness under insult. After placing himself in the presence of God, and begging aid from on high, he should represent to his imagination the court-yard which was the scene of the execution: he should behold with the eye of his mind our Saviour covered with shame, exposed naked in the sight of all the people, and around Him His tormentors, with terrible scourges in their hands, with scowling brows and faces flushed

* Spiritus meditatione et contemplatione ad Deum ascendit; Deus vero revelatione, atque divinâ inspiratione ad eum descendit.

† In meditatione meâ exardescet ignis. Ps. xxxviij. 4.

with wrath and fury: he should fancy that he hears the noise of the blows, and the whistling of the lashes, re-echoing through the whole court. Having formed thus his composition of place, he should dwell in detail upon the chief reasons and circumstances which show the bitterness of the suffering endured by our Lord in this scourging, as well as the admirable patience with which He underwent it all for love of us. He should ponder in his mind upon the various kinds of scourges that were used; all most horrible; upon the barbarous manner in which the executioners plied them, upon the exceeding delicacy of the body of Jesus, and upon the great number of stripes which the merciless wretches showered so pitilessly upon that sacred body. Thus he will be able to infer how dreadful must have been the torture of that most sacred flesh, how immense the agony of our dear Lord. Then, when he sees that, in all that storm of cruel stripes, Christ stands meek as a lamb under the shears of the shearer—as the prophet says—without giving way to a single lament, without uttering one complaint, or breathing forth one sigh; he should set himself to consider who it is that is suffering such bitter pangs, and submitting to such untold outrages: he should pass in review the infinite Majesty, the infinite Greatness, the infinite Power, with which Jesus could in a moment have destroyed and hurled back into nothingness those hard-hearted miscreants: and yet He not only did not revenge Himself upon them, but, tenderly loving them, He continued to offer to His eternal Father the very blows which He was receiving at their hands, that thus He might win their salvation. The gentleness of the Sacred Heart of Jesus should be studied, which was burning with love for those unfeeling men at the very time that they were burning with hatred of Him: that Heart which was consuming itself with fond affection for those sinners, who, more cruel than the executioners, would renew again and again with the scourges of their sinful actions that painful tragedy. After considerations and reflections such as these, the will should give free scope to feelings of compassion for so grievous pains; of love for so great goodness; of gratitude for so great a benefit: but most of all, the will should dwell upon the three affections which I have before mentioned as being most

profitable. He who is making this meditation should consider how he has in time past borne himself when in the midst of troubles and contradictions, persecution, insults, and outrages; and seeing himself so unlike his Lord, he ought to conceive a lively sorrow, and to fill himself with deep shame and confusion. He ought then to form his resolution never again to seek revenge, to keep down all risings of resentment, to make an offering to our Blessed Lord of whatever may give him annoyance; nay, going further still, he ought, in imitation of Jesus, to wish to return love for hate and kindness for wrong. In conclusion, knowing too well his own weakness, and the inconstancy of his will in carrying out the resolutions he has made, he ought to beg of God with fervent prayer to come to his aid, and enable him to be faithful to his purposes when the hour of trial comes.

176. With reference to these resolutions, which are the most important of all the acts of the will, it should be remarked that it is not enough to make them in some vague and abstract form; but there should be a distinct coming down to details, and making application to particular cases which have happened before, and may easily happen again: and it is about these that resolutions should be most carefully taken. As to resolutions conceived in a general manner—for instance: I will never more seek revenge for any injury whatever: I will never give way to passion again—resolutions such as these, I say, will be of almost as little advantage, for all practical purposes, as none at all. Cassian, speaking on this very subject of preparing ourselves to endure injuries and misfortunes with equanimity, remarks; that in our meditations we should often put before our eyes, one by one, all the affronts and outrages which we can suffer at the hands of our neighbour, and accustom ourselves to the thought of submitting to them with all humility, even going so far as turn over in our minds how to receive such with all the gentleness of our heart.*

* Propositis sibi multimodis injuriarum, dispendiorumque generibus, velut ab alio sibimet irrogatis, assuefaciat mentem suam, omnibus quæ inferre improbitas potest, perfectâ humilitate succumbere: atque aspera sibi quæque, et intolerabilia frequenter opponens, quantâ eis occurrere debeat lenitate, omni jugiter cordis contritione meditetur. Coll. xix., cap. 14.

In this spirit acted a good Brother of our Society, John Ximenes by name, who was accustomed to work the whole day at the farm, and when returning to the College at Saragossa in the evening, would walk along, his mind all recollected in God, forecasting in detail all the most disagreeable things that could befall him on his arrival, and accepting them severally with great readiness of will. "What would you do," he used to say to himself on the way, "if the moment you reach the College to rest yourself, after your labour, your Superior ordered you to do this or that piece of work?" "Your Superior" (self-love interposed quickly) "seeing you so tired, never would give you so unwise an order." "But supposing that he were to do so," the Brother would answer back, "how should you act?" "How should I act? I should accept it, O Lord, most willingly for love of Thee. Yes, dear Lord, yes; grant that he may give me the order, that I may have a chance of giving Thee some little proof of my faithfulness and love." When accordingly he met with any of these vexations, so trying to nature, he went through the ordeal with the most perfect dispositions; because his mind was already prepared for them, and was even expecting them.*

177. But what is told in the Life of St. Francis of Assisi is of more weight.† The holy Patriarch, finding himself one day all on fire with holy love, began to prepare himself to receive all possible injuries and insults with heroic patience and meekness: he disposed himself, I mean, to accept such and such an affront, not only with resignation and calmness, but even with joy and jubilee of mind: for this exactly it is that constitutes the heroism of these virtues. Conversing on the way with his companion, Brother Leo, he cried out, with great fervour: "Listen to me, Brother: what, if on arriving at the Convent of Our Lady of the Angels, tired out with our long journey, dripping wet, stiff with cold, splashed with mud, and dying of hunger, we were to knock at the door, and the Porter were to come to us in an angry mood, and ask, who are you? and if on our telling him that we were two Friars Minor, he were to say: 'No! you are not of our Order. I am inclined to think you are two good-for-nothing

* In Vitâ Balthass. Alvarez, cap. 45. † Cap. 46.

fellows, a couple of tramps who go roaming over the country, taking the bread out of poor people's mouths :' and if, having said this, he were to slam the door in our faces, and leave us there to ourselves, wet through, and half-dead with cold and weariness, standing out in the cold wind, without giving us any assistance; and if we, treated thus, were to endure all, and relish all, for the love of God, depend upon it, Brother Leo, in this is perfect joy." The meaning of the Saint was, that in this consists heroic meekness, which is nothing but perfect joy in the midst of insults. Then conjuring up other possible cases of still greater contumely, he went on: "And what if, under force of necessity, we were to knock again at the door, and the Brother Porter were to come out in a rage, and say: 'You pair of scoundrels, you impudent, pestering, unmannerly knaves, be off with you this very instant; go to the hospital, for there is no lodging here for such as you!' and if we were to put up with this abuse and ill-treatment joyously, from our hearts forgiving it; depend upon it, Brother Leo, this is perfect joy. And if, as the night went on, finding ourselves sore pressed, and suffering in every way, we were to knock at the door once again, and with tears in our eyes crave shelter for the love of God; and the man, made savage, coming out with a stick in his hand, were to heap reproaches and blows upon us, and seizing hold of us were to throw us down into the mire, and we bore these outrages with real jubilee of heart: depend upon it, Brother Leo, this is perfect joy."

178. In this anecdote remark, that St. Francis, when, in the fervour of his soul, he was exciting himself and his companion to heroic patience, did not propose in general, that they should resolve to endure joyfully all the hardships and insults that might happen, but he came down to particular cases, and pictured them to himself in their special, individual, and minutest details: because good desires and holy resolves then only attain their object, and become really useful to us, when they are formed after the above fashion. Therefore, in our own meditations, we shall do well to make our resolutions in the same manner; and by thus overcoming, again and again, in the light of the eternal truths, those dislikes which present themselves at the thought of suffer-

ing that we have conjured up, we shall dispose ourselves for victory in the presence of suffering that is real. We shall, moreover, in the various incidents of life, find ready to our hand the means and ways of self-conquest, and the motives for striving after it, if in our mental prayer we have thought them out, and solidly established them beforehand in our souls; and having grown expert in the sham battles of our own imaginings, like a man who fences for his amusement, we shall be skilful in conquering ourselves when it comes to engaging in combats that are real. The Director should nevertheless be apprised that when he meets with weak characters, without spirit enough to apply to this work of calling up disagreeable pictures before the mind, he must not expose them to the ordeal of such imaginations, but it will be quite enough if he propose to them to do, with God's help, when the time comes, all that shall be in their power.

179. In the last place, the meditation should close with a Colloquy, which consists of fervent acts of the will, appropriate to the subject of the meditation which has just been made, but more especially of prayers, petitions, and entreaties—as humble, confiding, and ardent as the strength of our souls can make them—to gain the aids we need, and chiefly for carrying out the resolutions formed. Then, as Jacob, after wrestling with God on that well-known night, declared, *I will not let Thee go until Thou bless me*,* so we, after holding converse with God all the time of our meditation, must not let Him go till we have won from Him by many prayers a plentiful blessing of graces, aids, and very special helps for the amendment of our life.

* Non dimittam te, nisi benedixeris mihi. Genes. xxxij. 26.

CHAPTER IV.

SOME DIFFICULTIES REMOVED WHICH PREVENT MANY FROM TAKING UP, AND OTHERS FROM CONTINUING, THE PRACTICE OF MEDITATION.

180. MANY people in the world live on without ever making the slightest use of holy meditation, under the impression that it is a practice belonging exclusively to monks and nuns, or else to men of learning and high mental endowments. This is a mistaken notion, utterly at variance with experience and reason alike. Meditation consists in the exercise of the three powers of the rational soul—memory, understanding, and will; and he, therefore, who has the free use of these powers, can laudably apply himself to the work of meditating. Is there any one so deficient that he cannot employ these three powers on the daily concerns of life? Who is there that cannot, if there be question of furthering his temporal interests, adduce his good reasons, urge them with argument, illustrate them by examples, and make them plausible by fitting reflections? Now, why cannot he do as much when his object is something spiritual? It is true that such objects are removed from the sphere of the senses: but then it is also true that God, by the light of grace, brings them home to the understanding, and makes them clearly visible, thus enabling the mind to form practically useful and advantageous reflections. At the same time He, with secret inspirations, stirs up the will to elicit affectionate desires, in order that it may entertain itself upon objects of the kind with all ease and holy satisfaction. Tell me, what learning had Catherine of Sienna, Teresa of Jesus, Rose of Lima, Magdalene de' Pazzi, and thousands upon thousands of pure virgins, who had made no other studies in all their lives than those which taught them to handle the needle and the distaff? What learning did St. Francis of Paula possess? or St. Francis of Assisi, or St. Didacus, the Franciscan lay-brother? or so many more who had scarcely ever set foot inside a school in search after human knowledge? And yet, in the practice of

mental prayer, they surpassed men of most exalted talent and of the greatest literary fame: they even soared beyond the limits of simple meditation, and rose to the highest flight of heavenly contemplation. And the reason is this, that the good success of meditation depends upon the grace of God; for gaining which, goodwill is of more avail than subtle intellect or depth of learning; and, to use St. Teresa's own words, it is not strength of muscle that is needed here, but of love alone.* Let no one, then, for lack of knowledge or of natural talent, refrain from meditating every day upon some truth of faith. Of course, I am speaking of those who are not absolutely illiterate; for to these, as I have before remarked, God supplies all deficiencies, with the power of His grace, by their vocal prayer. Let all present themselves before God with deep humility and lively confidence, and the Almighty, coming to their help, will enable them to do what their own unaided ignorance could never have achieved.

181. There are others, again, who adopt the practice of meditating daily on the Four Last Things, or on the Passion of Our Saviour, or on some other supernatural truth—and what is the result? Finding in this method of prayer many and constant distractions and habitual unsteadiness of mind, they are disheartened, lose courage, and, thinking this holy exercise beyond their ability, soon come to abandon it. To disabuse such persons of their error, they must be made to see where their fallacy lies. To this end they must learn to distinguish between two kinds of distraction which may occur in time of meditation. Some distractions are voluntary and wrong; others involuntary and free from fault. If their distractions spring from a flighty imagination, or from the malice of the demon, who puts unreasonable fancies into their mind expressly to disturb their peace and to hinder the fruit of their prayers; and if distractions are not desired, and not acquiesced in when they come unsought, there is no reason at all for discouragement: because, as St. Thomas says, such distractions can never destroy the spiritual character of meditation, or prevent its being a holy and meri-

* Foundations, chap. 14.

torious exercise.* St. Augustine assures us that these involuntary distractions do not take away from our prayer the fruit which is sought.† Cassian, moreover, for the comfort of these afflicted souls, goes so far as to assert, that there is no one so fervent and so high in perfection as not to be at times assailed by these vain imaginations, and whose thoughts are not carried off from the things of heaven to the things of earth.‡ And St. Augustine goes still further, and says, that not even holy David, though he enjoyed such wonderful intercourse with God in prayer, was free from distractions; since he himself tells us that he was forced to go in search of his own truant heart, that he might lead it back to God after it had escaped from him in time of prayer.§ Hence, if distractions encountered in meditation—no matter how frequent they be—are not wilful, why should any one lose heart, grow discouraged, and give up so holy, so very useful and pious a practice, seeing that these involuntary thoughts do not displease God, do not deprive prayer of merit, do not destroy its fruit, and are experienced by even the holiest and the most sublimely gifted persons?

182. And even if the distractions be voluntary and sinful (as is the case with those who in time of meditation try to find in such thoughts relief from weariness, or entertain them when they come unsought, and dwell upon them, deliberately feeding themselves upon vain and idle fancies), not even in such case

* Dicendum, quod in spiritu et veritate orat, qui ex instinctu spiritûs ad orandum accedit, etiamsi ex aliquâ infirmitate mens postea evagetur. 2, 2 Quæst. 85, art. 13, ad. 1.

† Psalmis et hymnis, cum oras Deum, hoc versetur in corde, quod profertur in ore; evagatio vero mentis, quæ fit præter propositum, orationis fructum non tollit. In Regulâ 3.

‡ Quis tantum spiritûs potuit unquam retinere fervorem, ut non interdum lubricis cogitationibus ab ipsâ quoque orationis intentione translatus, repente a cœlestibus ad terrena corruerit? Coll. xxiii., cap. 7.

§ Diceret unusquisque sibi contingere et alteri non contingere, hoc est pati mentis distractiones orando, nisi inveniremus in Scripturis Dei David orantem quodam loco et dicentem: Quoniam inveni, Domine, cor meum ut orarem ad te. Invenire se dixit cor suum, quasi soleret ab eo fugere, et ille sequi quasi fugitivum, et non posse comprehendere; et clamare ad Dominum: Quoniam cor meum dereliquit me. In Psalm. 85.

ought persons to renounce their wonted meditations, but rather to set right what is amiss, and go forward on their course with constancy. And as one who in eating and drinking is habituated to commit sins of wilful intemperance, ought not for all that to stop eating and drinking, to the loss of his life, or the damage of his health, but should attain the mastery over his fault, and take the necessary food at fitting times, as others do: so he who in time of prayer fails in his duty by deliberately yielding to wanderings of the mind, ought not to abandon meditation, to the great injury of his spiritual life, but should dismiss those distracting thoughts, and apply himself, for the future, more carefully to the steady consideration of the great truths of eternity.

183. Both these kinds of distraction were, for our instruction and the ordering of our behaviour, shown in a vision to Abbot Macarius, as we read in the lives of the Fathers.* One night the devil, in the disguise of a monk, came to the cell of this servant of God, and knocking at the door, cried out: "Get up, Macarius, and come to the church, where the monks are already assembling for prayer." The holy man knew by the light of God that his visitor was not what he pretended to be, but that the demon was in reality hiding himself under the assumed appearance of a monk. So, raising his voice, he exclaimed, "Impostor, and foul liar! what have you to do with prayer? What concern have you with the meetings of holy servants of the Most High?" "Are you unaware," the devil made answer, "that the monks never pray without me? If you know it not, you shall see it now with your own eyes." Then the holy Abbot repaired to the church, for it was in fact the time when the monks were met to pass the remainder of the night in singing psalms and in pious contemplation. On his arrival, Macarius set himself to pray, and began to entreat the Almighty to let him know if there was any truth whatever in the devil's boast about the prayer made by the monks. On a sudden he saw the whole church crowded with little black imps, hurrying to and fro like rats and mice. When the chanting began in choir, he saw some of these imps put a finger into the mouth of one or other of

* Ex Lib. Sentent. Patrum. s. 39.

the monks, who straightway would open his mouth and yawn; others he saw lay their fingers on the eyes of certain monks—these at once closed their eyelids, dropped their heads, and went off in a doze; while the demons befooled the rest in divers other ways, all having for object to disturb the sacred chant. When at last the psalmody was completed, all the monks applied themselves to mental prayer. And then St. Macarius saw how some of these devils assumed the shape of women trying to court admiration; some took the appearance of masons engaged in building a house; some made themselves look like travellers equipped for a journey; and others put on different other strange forms; and he saw them, thus variously disguised, presenting themselves to the monks during their meditations, in order to provoke their curiosity under these fantastic shapes. He observed, however, that there were certain monks to whom these annoying images were no sooner presented by the tempters, than they fled away in haste, and dared not attack them any more, or even so much as pass near them. With others of the religious, on the contrary, they took time at will, and went on presenting these fancies, jumping upon them, dancing around them, and scornfully turning them to sport. When the prayer was ended, Macarius called the monks to him, and asked them, one by one, what had been passing through their minds in the time of meditation; and he found that all the things which he had seen done externally by the devils, had also made an impression on the minds of the recluses, and that the demons had fled headlong from all those who had put away promptly their idle suggestions, while they tarried long to mock and lead into delusion those alone who had voluntarily allowed their minds to dwell on the unseemly images and distracting thoughts.

184. From this we may learn how truly Cassian says that our minds cannot keep free from all distractions in our prayer; since it is not in our power to prevent the devil from entering into our imagination, and setting our thoughts in movement by presenting this or that phantasm. But it is well within our power to drive away these images after they have been introduced, and we can accomplish this so thoroughly, that they will

do us no harm nor interfere with the merit and the fruit of our meditations.* Therefore, no one should despond, no one give up the practice of meditating, however incessant and vexatious may be the distracting thoughts which lead his attention away from God; as he should know full well that, if only true to himself, all these annoyances can never deprive him of the fruit which he hopes to win from so pious an exercise.

185. One thing which may help very much to save devout persons from the trouble of these distractions, is an act of the presence of God, made with all the determination, and all the vividness of faith at their command: for, if in the presence of their King they would not dare (this remark is made by St. Basil) to stare about them on this side and on that, but would conduct themselves when in his sight with all due modesty and a fitting respectful behaviour, how much more will any one shrink from allowing his thoughts to wander off to earthly things, who believes with an earnest faith that he is standing in the presence of that great God Who reads with His glance all that passes in our mind and heart?†

186. But if, in despite of all such precautions, the devil puts into the mind suggestions of worldly concerns, those who meditate must have recourse at once to the thought of God's presence, and take shame to themselves for their disrespect, involuntary though it be; and in this way, like holy David, they must bring back their wayward and wandering hearts to God. And as Abraham, according to the observation of Pope St. Gregory, drove away at once those birds of prey which settled upon the victim whilst he was in the act of immolating it to the Most High God; so, when in time of mental prayer, we perceive flitting across our mind unholy thoughts with which the devil fain would rob us of some

* Mentem quidem non interpellari cogitationibus impossibile est; suscipere vero eas, sive respuere, omni studenti possibile est. Quemadmodum igitur ortus earum non omnimodo pendet a nobis, ita reprobatio et ejectio consistit in nobis. Coll. j., cap. 17.

† Si enim principem aliquis, aut præsidem intuens et cum eo loquens, oculos ab eo dimovere non solet: quî non tandem credibilius est intentam mentem habiturum illum, qui Deo preces adhibeat, in eum, qui scrutatur corda et cogitationes? In Regul. Brevior.

portion of the sacrifice we are making of our own hearts to God, we should instantly drive them away, by placing ourselves anew in the presence of God Almighty, to Whom we are offering the holocaust of our desires.* And if our thoughts go wandering off a hundred times in the course of one single meditation, a hundred times we should recall them without the smallest discouragement, and, placing ourselves humbly before God, resume the thread of our devout reflections. Thus will our mental prayer, in defiance of all distractions, be very pleasing to the Lord, and also greatly advantageous to our own spiritual welfare.

CHAPTER V.

TWO OTHER DIFFICULTIES WHICH LEAD MANY TO GIVE UP THE PRACTICE OF MEDITATION.

187. THERE are some pious persons so weak in character, that whenever they find in their meditations a certain sweetness and relish, they are for making them frequently and spending a long time over them; and these would wish never to take their minds off the ideas which produce in their hearts a feeling of devotion which they find so agreeable. But whenever God dries up the source of these sensible consolations, and leaves them in aridity of heart and darkness, in gloom and desolation of spirit, they lose all esteem and affection for mental prayer; under the idea that these prayers, made without feeling and without any sensible devotion to nourish the soul, are of no value in the eyes of God and of no help to their own progress: from this they pass to the

* Nam sæpe in ipso orationis sacrificio importunæ se cogitationes ingerunt, quæ hoc rapere, vel maculare valeant, quod in nobis Deo flentes immolamus. Unde Abraham, cum ad occasum solis sacrificium offerret, insistentes aves pertulit, quas studiose, ne oblatum sacrificium raperent, abegit; sic nos cum in aræ cordis holocaustum Deo offerimus, ab immundis hoc volucribus custodiamus, ne maligni spiritus et perversæ cogitationes rapiant, quod mens nostra offerre se Domino utiliter sperat. Moral., lib. xvi., cap. 19.

belief that such arid and dry meditation is sheer waste of time, and that they can employ themselves in something better with greater profit. Misled by these false notions, they either abandon this holy exercise, or shorten it, or go through it with the greatest carelessness. Such persons will do well to call to mind what I said on the authority of St. Thomas of Aquin, in the first Chapter of the present Article, namely, that the substance of true devotion does not consist in sentiment or feeling, but in the promptness of the will to yield obedience, homage, and faithful service to God. The sensible emotions of sweetness, which, taking their rise from these acts of a devoted will, on some occasions overflow into the lower part of the soul, filling it also with sweetness, are merely accidental to devotion, the presence or absence of which is of no importance. The prayer of Jesus Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane was dry and arid to the last degree; nay, full even of weariness, melancholy, and deadly languor; yet it was the holiest and the most meritorious prayer ever made on earth; because our Saviour, praying in His Father's presence, though no sensible devotion came to cheer Him, nevertheless submitted Himself promptly to the will of His Eternal Father, offering Himself a voluntary victim to suffer and to die for the redemption of mankind. So that if any one finds himself as dry in prayer as the desert sand, he has but to resign himself to God's will, and, humbling himself in God's presence, to persevere without flinching, and in the midst of dryness still form the resolutions, the petitions, the desires, which he was wont to make with much feeling in former sweet and delightful meditations. This is the time of real and solid devotion, though we may think ourselves entirely bereft of it. Indeed, these dry meditations are more full of merit, generally speaking, if only we do our duty, than many others made with great unction, and filled to the brim with spiritual consolations: because, to submit in painful prayer to the will of God, to make acts of real humility and self-oblation, to pray earnestly and perseveringly, conjuring the Almighty Lord, and using many industries of supplication, is of necessity to do great violence to self in the struggle to overcome the repugnance of nature when left in aridity and desolation. Now this it is which

truly makes the acts of the will (in which resides the marrow of merit and of devotion alike) grow in strength, intensity, and merit. And thus, in the meditations we make in seasons of aridity, the soul waxes strong, even if the body grow weak: and if the animal man be exhausted, the spirit of man finds new vigour fresh increase of power.

188. In confirmation of this teaching, I will quote the words, as given by Blosius, which Almighty God addressed to the holy virgin St. Gertrude: "I would that My elect ones were persuaded of this truth—that their prayers and their good works are very pleasing to Me, when they serve Me at their own expense. Serving Me at their own expense consists in this; that when they experience no feeling nor relish whatever in their devotions, they go on notwithstanding, faithfully performing their prayers and spiritual exercises to the best of their power, trusting that My goodness will accept them all in good part." * Then our Lord added these memorable words: "Know, Gertrude, that, with the greater number of pious souls, if I were to give them sensible devotion and spiritual consolation, it would not be of service to their salvation; indeed, instead of enhancing their merit, I should be doing much to lessen it." † How true this is, the experience of every day shows us but too well; for we see that pious persons most commonly avail themselves of the consolations which God sends them, either to feed their own self-love by clinging to them, or to keep alive some vain complacency—fancying that they have made great progress in the virtues which they practise, not indeed because they have gained a habit of the virtue, but owing to the impulse of sensible grace:—or else such persons make use of consolations to supply fresh incentive to their pride, giving themselves the preference over those who ostensibly do not act with the same fervour. And hence this sensible devotion, engendered though

* Vellem electis meis persuasum esse, quod eorum bona exercitia et opera omnino placent, quando ipsi serviunt expensis suis. Illi autem expensis suis mihi servitium præstant, qui licet saporem devotionis minime sentiant, fideliter tamen, ut possunt, orationes et alia pia exercitia sua peragunt, confidentes de pietate meâ, quod ego libenter et grate suscipiam. Monit. Spirit., c. iij. s. 3.

† Plerique sunt, quibus si sapor et consolatio interna concederetur, non eis prodesset ad salutem, et meritum ipsorum valde minueretur. Ibid.

it be by God's grace in their hearts, is by their fault very frequently turned into a serious injury. Let, therefore, none make light of dry, distasteful, wearisome and gloomy meditations, nor think of leaving off the exercise as of no use or benefit, seeing that not unfrequently they are more useful, more secure, and more meritorious, than meditations which surpass them in delight.

189. Then there are other persons, who, from the aridity they experience at their meditations, draw the silly inference that they are forsaken by God; because when they no longer feel His presence in their heart, they make up their minds that He has withdrawn Himself completely from them, and even, so to speak, turned His back upon them. And thus these also are easily brought to neglect their accustomed meditations. I have myself fallen in with persons whom I found cast down into the depths of absolute despair by this most foolish motive. So far are these persons from having the true idea of their state, that their very trials, dryness, desolation, darkness and gloom, are more often than not the signs of a special love borne them by God, since by these means He wishes to raise them to a higher level of perfection, and sometimes to the gift of a very sublime and privileged prayer. To the end that we may understand the manner in which this comes to pass, we must know that Almighty God is wont to deal with souls after the following fashion. At the outset of their spiritual journey He imparts many sensible consolations and many spiritual delights, to the end that He may thus draw them to His holy service by these sweetnesses, to wean them from worldly pleasures, and to animate them to prayer and the practice of Christian virtue, as St. Paul did with the Corinthians: As little ones in Jesus Christ, he says, I fed you with milk, and not with strong meat; for you were young in spiritual life, and incapable of taking solid food, and indeed you are so even yet.* But when, later on, Almighty God sees that the soul is well grounded in the firm resolve to serve Him, and cannot easily be turned away to hanker after the fleshpots of Egypt, then He with-

* Tamquam parvulis in Christo lac vobis potum dedi, non escam, nondum enim poteratis: sed nec nunc quidem potestis: adhuc enim carnales estis. 1 Cor. iij. 1, 2.

draws the sweetness of His grace, and deprives us of the relish and sensible warmth which we had before felt in our devotions; and this in order that, being now detached from the pleasures of sense, we may detach ourselves also from spiritual joys, and begin to practise virtue, not for any self-satisfaction, but for its own sake alone. And the Almighty has a further object in view, namely, to make our meditations themselves more perfect, raising us by means of this painful and distressing desolation of soul from a spiritual sweetness of sense, to a sublime penetration of spirit; according to the word of the Prophet Isaiah: "To whom shall the Lord give knowledge and understanding of divine things if it be not to those who are taken from the breast, and weaned from the milk of sensible consolations?"* It would in fact be hard to find any really holy person who has not been put in the crucible of long-continued dryness in prayer, and who, by means of this refining process, has not been purified by Almighty God, and lifted up at the same time to a higher grade of prayer.

190. The following very consoling vision will explain what I have just been saying.† A pious matron was assisting at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, in company with three devout maidens. After the consecration and elevation of the Sacred Host, she saw the Child Jesus on the altar, with His face all radiant with glory. Soon she saw Him descend from the altar, and hurry to the spot where the three young ladies were kneeling. He was no sooner there than He threw His arms round the neck of one of them, and pressing her lovingly to His heart, kissed her and heaped caresses upon her. Going to another He raised the veil from her face, just enough to allow her to see Him, and to gaze lovingly upon Him. Then approaching the third, He seized her with one hand, and with the other began to strike her in the face. After acting thus, the Divine Infant returned to the altar, and as soon as He had reached it the vision disappeared. The holy matron was filled with wonder at the sight, and desired to know the meaning of the different treatment which Jesus Christ had

* Quem docebit scientiam? quem intelligere faciet auditum? Ablactatos a lacte, avulsos ab uberibus. Cap. xxij. 9.

† Specul. Exempl., Dist. ix., Exempl. 202.

shown to these pious girls. The Lord gave heed to her holy wishes, and with an interior voice, clear and unmistakable, told her, that the first of the young ladies was of a weak and fickle character, and that He caressed her with many endearments during her prayer, for without this she would soon have turned away from Him and returned to the pleasures of the world: that the second was less weak, and therefore to retain her in His service it was enough if He imparted to her some degree of clear knowledge of Himself, and some little encouragement of sensible feeling at her accustomed devotions—but that the third was His own beloved spouse; because, in spite of all the bitter desolations and severe trials with which He afflicted her, she was ever constant in His service, ever faithful in His love.

191. Who, on first hearing of the above vision, would not have imagined that the first of these virgins, so fondly caressed by the Sacred Child, was a chosen soul; that the second, treated so kindly, was a soul far advanced in perfection; and that the third, so harshly dealt with, was a soul hardened in sin and already cast off by the Infant Saviour? Yet it was not so. Nay, those who received marks of favour were the less perfect, and the one who suffered bitterness of soul was a real saint. So true is it that the aridities we suffer in prayer are very commonly tokens of the love which God bears to our souls, not of His having forsaken us, as some foolishly try to make out. For our Lord, by these painful visitations, so hard to bear, designs to lead souls to a higher degree of perfection, and peradventure even of contemplation. Hence let no one give way to distrust, let no one lose heart or begin to despair, by reason of these attacks of desolation, or allow himself ever, on their account, to forego his ordinary meditations; but let each one, in these seasons of dryness, strive to keep on his way with resignation and humility, calmly and with perseverance, knowing the great good which may accrue from such visitations.

192. The other difficulty, which keeps some from persevering in the practice of holy meditation, is the assault of temptations. There is no single thing which so vexes the devil as to see a person devoted to mental prayer; for right well he knows the

good that flows therefrom: for perseverance in meditation is enough of itself to deprive the wicked one of all hope of entangling the prey in his net. Therefore in time of prayer he suggests to the mind a thousand vile thoughts, and he makes use of a thousand wiles and a thousand crafty schemes, to draw us aside from so holy an exercise. Some who wish to recollect themselves in God, he tries to overthrow by putting impure images before their mind; to others he suggests thoughts against faith; in others he awakens the spirit of blasphemy; in others, scruples, or distrust, or tumultuous thoughts and restless movements of passion. But St. Basil tells us that servants of God ought not to let themselves be cast down by troubles of this sort, and much less to give over their meditation, as though their difficulties sprang from this exercise: they ought, on the contrary, to do battle bravely for the love of that God in Whose presence they are; till the Lord, well pleased at the sight of their constancy and taking compassion upon them, with one ray of His light disperse the devilish darkness and storms which were sweeping over both mind and heart.*

193. St. Bridget being one day molested by grievous temptations in time of prayer, the Blessed Virgin appeared, and addressed her in these words, as recorded by the above-mentioned Blosius: "The devil, envious of the good of others, is always going round about, seeking to hinder the prayers of just souls. Thou, therefore, my daughter, however fiercely the devils may rage around thee with their temptations, remain firm with great constancy, in thy goodwill and desire of prayer, and make every effort to do what thou canst; because this very desire of praying, the very effort made, the very use of the various expedients adopted by thee to secure devout attention, will be the fruit that springs from thy prayer. And though thou mayest not succeed in driving away the foul and loathsome thoughts which the devil puts into thy

* Quod si flagitiosarum cogitationum vis vehementior insurgat, nec sic quidem dejiciendus est animus, neque suscepta certamina ex dimidiâ parte confecta derelinquenda, sed eo usque obfirmate perdurandum, quoad Deus, perspectâ constantiâ, gratiâ Spiritûs Sancti nobis effulgeat. In Constit. Monast., cap. 18.

heart; yet, for the strong endeavour thou hast made to banish them, and to keep thyself in God's presence, thou shalt receive a crown of never-fading glory in Heaven. Thus, the very annoyance of the temptations which come to assail thee in prayer will only prove a fresh assistance to thee, provided thou yield no consent to them, and they give nothing but displeasure to thee."* He, then, who is tempted by temptations in prayer-time, should meditate seriously on these words, and, from the instruction imparted by the Blessed Virgin Mary to her dearly-beloved servant Bridget, he may renew his courage, and find therein a rule of conduct to enable him to keep ever true to God in the midst of these so rude encounters.

194. Not content with annoying devout souls by inward suggestions, in order to deter them from mental prayer, the devil strives, moreover, at times, to alarm them by outward noises and phantoms of frightful shape, in order that, in their fright, they may cut short the thread of their pious considerations and lose the fruit which they were on the point of gathering. Let him who may be thus assailed take heed not to give way to the enemy by withdrawing from prayer panic-stricken at harmless apparitions; or else, finding that he has gained a victory, he will often again use the same means of annoyance. Let such persons take a lesson from the Saints, who, when assailed by their infernal enemies in a thousand frightful shapes, persevered with dauntless constancy in their devout meditations, and thus forced the devil to fly in shame and confusion. We read of St. Dominic † that while he was one day praying in the church, the devil, in a fit of envy, cast from a great height a large stone, which made the holy place re-echo with its fall, and passed so near the Saint as to

* Diabolus explorator invidus quærit impedire bonos, dum orant. Tu vero, filia, quantumcumque tentatione pulseris inter orandum, persiste in desiderio, vel bonâ voluntate et conatu sancto, sicut commode potes; quia desiderium et conatus tuus pius reputabitur pro effectu orationis. Etiamsi pravas et sordidas cogitationes, quæ cordi tuo incidunt, ejicere non poteris, tamen pro illo conatu coronam in coelis recipies: ita tibi proderit illa molestia, modo non consentias tentationi, sed tibi displiceat quod indecens est. Monit. Spir. cap. iij. s. 4.

† Theod. de Appol. In Vitâ, cap. 12.

touch his hair. But the religious took no more notice of what had happened than a stone would, if another fell close to it. The devil, confounded by so great courage, fled from the church discomfited. St. Bonaventure relates of St. Francis of Assisi* that the enemy, in order to disturb his contemplation and to make him leave the place, caused horrible noises to be heard sometimes, on the roof of the church or cell where he was praying, in such sort that the building seemed to him to resound with the bellowing of bulls, the roaring of lions, the growls of bears, and the howlings of wolves; but the Saint, all unconcerned, was wont to say: "Come on, come on, strike me, and put me to cruel torture if you have the permission." But St. Nilus relates something far more wondrous† of a monk whom the devil tossed about in the air like a tennis-ball, and yet the holy man interrupted not his prayer until he had entirely finished it. Equally wonderful is what we read in the history of our own Society, of a religious, Bernard by name, who persevered in prayer, though the devil, in the shape of a loathsome serpent, creeping up his habit, as far as the neck, slipped in between the under garment and the skin, and winding round his body, girdled his waist. Were I to relate all the horrid appearances under which the devil has shown himself to God's servants in time of prayer, I should never have done; as the lives of the saints are full of such frightful apparitions. I confine myself to what St. Jerome recounts in his Life of St. Hilarion.‡ While St. Hilarion was at prayer, the devil appeared to him, sometimes as a howling wolf, sometimes as a fox barking, and once set before him the awful spectacle of a band of gladiators; one of whom, it seemed to him, having received a death-wound, fell at his feet imploring the rites of burial. Another time, while the Saint was praying prostrate on the ground, some distraction or other passed through his mind. The devil, taking this opportunity, sat astride on his back, and driving spurs into his sides, and whipping him on the head, exclaimed, "Come, come; why art thou so sleepy?" As the servant of God grew faint under the weight and blows, the demon

* In Vitâ, cap. 5.
† De Orat., cap. 103.
‡ Part. 4, lib. j. n. 139.

began to scoff and deride him, saying, "Would you like a little corn to restore your strength?" *

195. I have alluded to these few examples among many others that might be alleged, that the reader may see with what constancy we should struggle and persevere in mental prayer when the devil comes to assail us either with inward suggestions or outward terrors. Let me now conclude in the words of St. Cyprian: "In the time of prayer, let the heart be opened to God but closed against the devil, so as to leave him not even the least aperture by which he may enter; for this deceiver uses a thousand wiles to effect a stealthy entrance, and having made good his position, deludes us and hinders our praying to God." †

CHAPTER VI.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS TO THE DIRECTOR ON THE FIRST THREE CHAPTERS OF THE PRESENT ARTICLE.

196. FIRST suggestion. From what has been said throughout the present Article, the Director will have clearly understood, that if he desire to lead any one to Christian perfection, it is imperative for him to induce the person to devote a certain time every day to meditation on some one of the most weighty maxims of our faith. By pious exhortations, it is true, he may succeed in uprooting from the hearts of his penitents certain defects, and in plucking out one or two bad habits; but his words will not avail to im-

* Interdum orantem lupus ululans, vel vulpecula ganniens transilivit, psallentique gladiatorum pugna spectaculum præbuit, et unus quasi interfectus, et ante pedes ejus corruens, sepulturam rogavit. Oravit semel fixo in terram capite, et ut natura fert hominum, abducta ab oratione mens nescio quid aliud cogitabat. Insiliit dorso ejus festinus gladiator et latera ejus calcaribus, cervicem flagello verberans: Eia, inquit, cur dormis? Cachinnansque desuper cum defecisset, an hordeum vellet accipere, sciscitabatur. Ibid.

† Claudatur contra adversarium pectus, et soli Deo pateat: nec ad se hostem Dei tempore orationis adire patiatur; obrepit enim frequenter et penetrat; et subtiliter fallens, preces nostras a Deo avocat. De Orat. Domin., Serm. 6.

plant in their hearts that frequent and almost continual practice of mortification and virtue which is so essential to the acquirement of perfection. For this depends upon a great fear and love of God, which, as is proved by the passage quoted from the Angelic Doctor and by our own daily experience, can hardly take root in the heart without the practice of mental prayer. I do not mean that the Director should counsel the use of meditation to peasants and artisans who are busied with manual labour from morning to night, and have neither time nor capacity to occupy themselves in this laudable exercise. What I mean is simply that he should endeavour to induce those who are free, to consecrate of their own accord some small portion of the day to this holy employment; especially such as are innocent and well-disposed, for in them divine grace produces great effects by reason of their good dispositions, and such, consequently, make rapid progress. Besides these, there are others to whom God, on the occasion of some sermon, or mission, or general confession, has vouchsafed the grace of a singular compunction, and of a firm resolve to amend their lives. In such, the above-mentioned grace, if sedulously cultivated by meditation, will vigorously forward the work which God has begun. But it is to the Clergy and members of Religious Communities that this exercise should be specially recommended, as they more than others are bound, by their state, to strive after perfection, and hence to make use of meditation, which St. John Chrysostom calls "the root and foundation of every virtue;"* and in another place "the head and source from which all virtues flow."†

197. At the time when the Court of Spain resided at Madrid, one of the nobles addressed himself to F. Peter Favre, a most saintly man, and the first of the nine companions whom St. Ignatius made use of when laying the foundation of his Order. This nobleman asked F. Favre for some directions which might be serviceable in putting his life in order and making his salvation sure. The Father's first impulse was to propose to him the practice of

* Basis et radix omnis virtutis. De Orando Deum, lib. i.
† Omnis virtutis caput. Ibid., lib. ij.

meditation, as the most effectual means of ensuring the salvation and perfection of any one possessed of the two-fold light of reason and faith. But seeing that he wore so rich a dress, and that he was all smelling of perfume, he rightly deemed that to one brought up amid the luxuries and splendours of a court, the word "meditation" would have a very barbarous sound. The holy Director found means, nevertheless, to lead the nobleman to meditate without so much as mentioning the word. "You will do as follows," he said: "Think over, now and then, these words—Christ poor, and I rich; Christ fasting, and I feasting; Christ naked, and I well clad; Christ in suffering, and I surrounded with every comfort and pleasure." Having said thus much, he held his peace. The nobleman thanked him for the good advice and took his leave, feeling, however, anything but pleased that one who was so highly spoken of as a great master of the spiritual life should have set him so elementary a lesson, which he, who had not as yet begun to study in the school of the Spirit, could have given just as well, not to say much better. He complied, notwithstanding, with the counsel he had received, and at divers times thought over the words which F. Favre had suggested, though without any feeling whatever of devotion; being inclined rather to mock at the Jesuit for his simplicity, than to call himself to account for his want of mortification. Being present one day at a sumptuous banquet, at which the most delicious viands and most exquisite wines were served, he set himself seriously to reflect on the above words, and to consider how glaring and unseemly was the contrast; and as he turned it over, again and again, in his mind, he felt such emotion that he began to sob and weep so abundantly as to be obliged to retire, in order to give vent to the floods of tears that burst from his heart. He afterwards called on F. Favre, and told him what had happened; and the good Jesuit, finding him duly disposed, exhorted him, in plain terms, to adopt the practice of meditating daily on some fundamental truth of faith, and gave the requisite instructions for the profitable performance of this holy exercise: thus leading him to a more godly mode of life.* This story may suggest the following reflec-

* Bartoli, Grandezze di Cristo, cap. x.

tion to Directors. If the mere consideration of a Gospel truth, taken up without any intention of meditating upon it, was so efficacious as to soften the heart of this nobleman, what will not be the power of the practice of daily meditation on the Four Last Things, our Blessed Saviour's Life and Sufferings, or on any other such truths of religion? The result then should be, that the Director ought to persuade, if he can, every one of his penitents in whom he discovers a sufficient capacity, to take up so wholesome a practice.

198. Second suggestion. The Director must be careful that such of his penitents as have begun the custom of daily meditation, do not get into the habit of forsaking it for slight motives; and still less, as I have observed above, on account of distractions, weariness, dryness, and such temptations as may assail them while conversing with God in mental prayer: for should the devil prevail over them on one or two occasions, they run great risk that he will succeed in persuading them to give it up altogether. St. Edmund was wont to meditate every day, and he chose for his subject the sorrowful Passion of our dear Lord.* It happened one day, that being absorbed in his studies, and engaged in important business, he omitted his usual meditation. As he was on the point of retiring to rest, he beheld the demon before him, taking various frightful shapes. He at once raised his right hand, in order to arm himself with the sign of the cross. But the fiend, seizing it, hindered him from completing the sign which is so formidable to the demons. The Saint then lifted up his left hand, that at least he might sign himself with that; but the devil seized the left hand also, and held him fast. The holy servant of God seeing himself thus outwardly disarmed, had recourse to the interior weapon of prayer against his assailant. The enemy, unable to withstand this, fell, exhausted and discomfited, between the bed and the wall. Then St. Edmund, perceiving his advantage, began himself to attack his opponent, laid hold of him, and grasping him by the throat, said, "I command thee by the blood of Jesus Christ to tell me with what weapon I may do thee most injury, and restrain thy power the most." The demon made answer, that this weapon was precisely

* Vincent. Bellovacens. Spec. Hist., lib. xxxj., cap. 76.

that Precious Blood by which he had been adjured. And, of a truth, the wicked one had already shown by his acts how very true was this: because, as the Saint had omitted his usual meditation on the Blood and Passion of our Redeemer that same morning, the foul fiend had the daring and strength to assail him so fiercely. The Director will not seldom see the like befall those under his care, unless he take heed. I mean, he will experience that on days upon which they have neglected their wonted meditation, the devil prevails over them, and makes them fall into some notable fault; and should this happen often, he will see them at length wholly abandon mental prayer, to their immense loss. Let him then see to it, that so great an evil do not happen to them.

199. Third suggestion. The matter of meditation which the Director will prescribe to those whom he guides should be adapted to the state of each one. Beginners, who are in the purgative way, are best suited by such meditations as stir up a holy fear, and a lively sorrow for their sins; as, for instance, those on Death, Judgment, Hell, Eternity, the deformity of sin, and other like topics. To proficients, who are in the illuminative way, meditations on the Life and Passion of our Saviour are the most adapted, as these will encourage them to acquire the various virtues. For the perfect, who are in the unitive way, meditations on the Perfections and Attributes of God are the most fitted, as being the best calculated to enkindle within them that perfect love which will unite them to God. This distribution does not imply that each one may not, or should not, occasionally, take meditations belonging to one of the other classes, especially such as relate to the Life of Christ and to His most holy Passion, which none, whatever their state, should ever entirely give up; for as St. Augustine excellently observes,* "The Son of God, Who

* Filius Dei, qui semper in Patre Veritas et Vita est, assumendo hominem factus est Via. Ambula per hominem et pervenis ad Deum. Per ipsum vadis, ad ipsum vadis. Noli quærere, quâ ad ipsum pervenias præter ipsum. Si enim via ipse esse noluisset, semper erraremus. Factus ergo est via, quâ venias. Non tibi dico, quærere viam; ipsa via ad te venit: surge et ambula. Ambula moribus, non pedibus. Serm. lv. De Verb. Dom.

eternally is Truth and Life in the bosom of the Father, is become the Way, by taking to Himself our manhood. Take His manhood as the path, and thou comest unto God. Through Him dost thou go, to Him shalt thou go. Seek no other way to attain unto Him but Himself. Had He not chosen to be Himself the Way, we should have wandered everlastingly. And, therefore, He became the Way by which thou mayest reach thy destination. I say not, that thou shouldst seek the Way, for the Way itself has come to thee. Arise, then, and walk. Walk by thy conduct, not with thy feet."

200. Blosius relates, that the Lord Jesus Christ very frequently revealed to His well-beloved spouses, SS. Gertrude, Bridget, Mechtildis, and Catharine of Sienna, how acceptable it was to Him and advantageous to men, to meditate with attention and devotion on the pains He suffered during His most bitter Passion: a lesson these holy women took to heart; for the Passion of Christ—which, though never so bitter and cruel, yet is filled with the sweetness of divine love—was so deeply imprinted in their innermost souls, they were wont to meditate upon it with so ardent and sweet an affection, that to them it became honey in the mouth, melody in the ear, jubilee within the heart.* None, then, however uplifted in the contemplation of the Godhead, should dispense themselves from meditating on Christ's Passion, both because He is our sure Way, from which we may not depart, and such is the path which has ever been taken by the greatest contemplatives of Holy Church.

201. Fourth suggestion. With regard to the time a Director should advise his penitents to devote to meditation, two points should be considered:—First, the occupation of the penitent; Second, the capacity of his mind. If we cast an eye on the

* Frequentissime Dominus Jesus revelavit carissimis suis sponsis Gertrudi, Birgittæ, Mechthildi, Catharinæ, quam sit sibi acceptum, et homini fructuosum, recolere passionem Christi, piâ, humili et sincerâ attentione, vel devotione. Quod et ipsæ devotissime fecerunt: nam et eamdem Domini Jesu passionem (quæ licet amarissima, acerbissimaque fuerit, tota tamen caritatis dulcedine plena est), adeo profunde visceribus animarum suarum infixerant, et tam ardenti, suavique affectu, ruminare solebant, ut illa eis esset mel in ore, melos in aure, jubilus in corde. Monil. Spirit., cap. 2.

examples left us by the Saints in this particular, we shall find them to have been indefatigable in the exercise of mental prayer. St. Bernard spent whole days and nights, standing, in meditation and contemplation of heavenly things; insomuch, that his legs all swelling out, from having remained so long in the same position, he was unable to support himself on his feet. In the monastery of the Abbot Apollo, there lived an aged monk, who, as the Abbot John, quoted by Sophronius, tells us, was so given to contemplation, that he had worn a cavity about a hand-breadth deep in the board on which he was accustomed to kneel: as the narrator declares to have seen with his own eyes.* St. Gregory the Great relates of his aunt Tharsilla, that "when her corpse was stripped, in order to be washed, as is usual with the dead, it was discovered that, from her assiduity in prayer, her knees and elbows had become hard like the knees of a camel; whereby her mortal remains bore witness to what had been her soul's constant occupation during life."† St. Paul, the first Hermit, as St. Jerome informs us in his life which he wrote, was so addicted to mental prayer, "that even the body of the Saint, after his death, by its posture, seemed to pray to the God to *Whom all things live;* for he was found by St. Antony with his face and hands upturned to heaven, so that the holy man did not at first believe that life had fled, but rather that sense was absorbed in deep contemplation. But he soon discovered that it was not St. Paul, but only his corpse, which retained the devout attitude of prayer in which the Saint was when death came upon him.‡ From these and innumerable other instances which we may gather from ecclesiastical history, let us learn, that the measure which the Saints observed in their mental prayer was to pray without measure. Nor did this ill become them; for, on the one hand, they by no means neglected the duties of their respective callings, and on the

* Practic. Spirit., cap. 184.

† Cumque corpus ejus ad lavandum ex more mortuorum esset nudatum, longo orationis usu in cubitis ejus, ac genibus camelorum more inventa est obdurata cutis excrevisse; et quid vivens spiritus ejus semper egisset, caro mortua testabatur. Dialog., lib. iv., cap. 16.

‡ Quod etiam cadaver sancti, Deum, cui omnia vivunt, officioso gestu precabatur. In ejusdem vitâ.

other, prayer was never burdensome to them, as the fountain of devotion was, so to say, ever flowing in their hearts.

202. But to speak of the common run of men, a fixed space of time must be prescribed to each, to which they may usually limit themselves, in order to avoid the opposite extremes of excess and defect. This limit must, in the first place, be determined by the nature of each one's occupations: in other words, the daily meditations should not be so long as to interfere with the duties of ordinary life, to fatigue the head, or overtask bodily strength; in short, to do any serious injury to the health. It must, in the next place, be proportioned to the mental powers of each, for, as St. Thomas teaches, "The quantity of each thing should be determined by the end to be attained, as the quantity of a dose of medicine is measured by the requirements of health; hence it is that prayer should continue as long as it serves to kindle the fervour of inward affection. When it exceeds this measure, so that we cannot persevere in it without weariness, it should not proceed further."* But as it may easily happen that, through tepidity, some may deem themselves unfit to carry on meditation, when they might do so with advantage, whilst others, out of an indiscreet fervour, continue it beyond what their strength and the calls upon them allow, it would be well to supplement this general rule by the following regulation:—Each one should make up his mind to devote an hour, or at least half an hour, every day to meditation, despite whatever dryness may chance to supervene, with the understanding, that they may prolong it, or even make a second during the day, if their health and engagements allow, whenever the inspiration of God's grace incline them to do so. Such was the custom of St. Bernardine of Sienna mentioned above; and others have in like manner set apart for meditation a time which was in no case to be altered. With persons of leisure, or such as lead a purely contemplative life, the Director may be less

* Uniuscujusque autem rei quantitas debet esse proportionata fini, sic ut quantitas potionis sanitati; unde et conveniens est, ut oratio tantum duret, quantum est utile ad excitandam interioris desiderii fervorem. Cum vero hanc mensuram excedit, ita quod sine tædio durare non possit, non est ulterius protendenda 2, 2, qu. 83, art. 14, in corp.

sparing, and allow them a longer time for mental prayer, as it is an exercise in every way befitting their condition.

203. Three parts of the day are best suited to the meditation of eternal truths: midnight, morning, and evening. The Psalmist makes especial mention of them, thus: *At midnight do I rise to sing Thy praise, O God.** *At dawn of day will I meditate upon Thee.*† "*May my hands, lifted up in prayer, be as the evening sacrifice.*‡ But if we choose to meditate once only in the day, the morning is unquestionably the fittest time, the head being less clouded after sleep, and consequently more disposed for mental work; and the mind being less encumbered with distracting images and fancies, since the business of the day has not yet been taken in hand. And further, when a man begins his day with the consideration of the eternal truths, he strengthens himself beforehand, to use the expression of St. John Chrysostom, and arms himself against temptation. "We want arms," he said when preaching to the people of Antioch. "Now prayer is a mighty weapon. We require favourable wind, we have to forecast every danger, if we would pass the day without shipwreck and wounds. For daily do we meet with many rocks, and our bark frequently strikes upon them and sinks. Hence our need of prayer, especially in the morning and at night-time."§ "Give, therefore, to God," says St. John Climacus, "the first-fruits of the day, as the day will belong to him who has first taken possession of it."‖ And he adds, what a very spiritual person was wont to say of himself: "From what the morning meditation has been, I can judge how the remainder of the day will pass."¶ If, however, we desire to pay to God twice

* Mediâ nocte, surgebam ad confitendum tibi. Ps. cxviij. 62.

† In matutinis meditabor in te. Ps. lxij. 7.

‡ Elevatio manuum mearum sacrificium vespertinum. Ps. cxl. 2.

§ Armis nobis opus est. Magna ergo armatura oratio. Opus est ventis a puppi, opus omnia discere, ut diei spatium absque naufragiis et vulneribus transigamus. Multi namque per singulos dies scopuli; et frequenter illiditur scapha, atque submergitur. Propterea nobis opus est oratione, matutinâ præsertim et nocturnâ. Hom. 41, ad Popul. Antioch.

‖ Da Domino primitias diei tuæ; erit enim tota ejus, qui prior occupaverit. Gradus xvj.

¶ Ab ipso matutino tempore cursum totum meum diei scio.

in the day the holy tribute of our meditations, the evening will present another very fitting time, as St. Cyprian observes. This, however, in case that the person has not courage enough to interrupt his slumbers by rising at midnight to make his prayer, which would be the fittest time of all.*

CHAPTER VII.

PRACTICAL HINTS TO THE DIRECTOR ON THE FOURTH AND FIFTH CHAPTERS, INASMUCH AS THEY RELATE TO DRYNESS AND CONSOLATION IN PRAYER.

204. FIRST suggestion. When the penitent begins to taste spiritual consolation in mental prayer, the Director must learn how to guide him, so that such helps turn not to his spiritual loss instead of his advantage. God bestows consolation upon us, especially in the beginning, with a view to our profit, intending to encourage us by means of these enticements to the practice of solid virtue. Many, however, misuse them, and thus make, as we sometimes say, a poison out of a medicine. An attachment springs up to this sweetness, and meditation is no longer sought out of the desire to please God, but rather with a view to the spiritual gratification which is experienced. Hence, it results, that when these accustomed consolations fail, anxiety, gloom, diffidence and blameworthy alarm, gain an entrance. Others there are who place the whole essence of the spiritual life in these emotions; so that when they find themselves full of tender sentiments, they fancy that they are receiving much profit from them: but if after a time these feelings vanish, it seems to them that they are lost for ever. The Director should forestall all these inconveniences, as being highly prejudicial to any true progress in perfection;

* Recedente item sole et die cessante, necessario rursum orandum est. De Orat. Domin., Serm. 6.

and so soon as the penitent begins to feel the effects of sweetness, consolation, and fervour, must din into his ears this grand truth, that perfection does not consist in these feelings, but in self-denial, both inward and outward, and in the practice of true virtue: that if he neglect this, he will be by so much the more guilty in the sight of God, as he has received more favours at His hands. He should tell him that these sensible consolations are a token of weakness, and that, on this account, they are usually bestowed on beginners, who are still babes in the spiritual life. Let him give warning that such consolations cannot last for ever, nor can we be sure when they will return again, and that they will soon be changed into darkness and aridity; so that being forewarned the penitent may make timely preparation, and not yield, when the trial comes upon him, to sadness or despair. St. Bernard excellently observes: "If God gives you the grace of consolation, receive it not as if you thought that it was to be your lasting possession, belonging to you by an hereditary right, nor esteem that you can keep and retain it, as though it could never be taken from you: lest, when the time comes that God withdraws His hand and gift, you lose heart and fall into undue gloom and sadness." "Rather will you take heed," he continues, "if you savour the counsel of the Wise Man, to be mindful in evil days of happier ones, and in happy days to forecast the days of evil. Be not, therefore, over-confident in the days of your strength, but with the Prophet cry unto God, *When my strength shall fail me, forsake me not.*"* And the Saint will have us promise God not to forsake prayer, nor to relax in our resolve to exercise ourselves in virtue with the same readiness when the time of dryness shall come.†

* Sic autem, quamdiu adest gratia, delectare in ea, ut non te æstimes donum Dei jure hæreditario possidere; ita videlicet securus de eo, quasi numquam perdere possis, ne subito, cum forte retraxerit manum et subtraxerit donum, tu animo concidas et tristior quam oportet fias. Serm. 21, In Cant.

† Curabis potius, si sapis pro consilio sapientis, in die malorum non immemor esse bonorum; atque in die bonorum non immemor esse malorum. Ergo in die virtutis tuæ noli esse securus; sed clama ad Deum cum prophetâ et dic: Cum defecerit virtus mea, ne derelinquas me

205. The Director must further take care that in times of consolation the soul stand before God in much humility and great awe. I say this, as spiritual prosperity begets in some an indiscreet confidence which renders them too forward and, so to speak, too daring in their converse with God.[1] When the penitent is carried away with the relish, consolation, and fervour of his devotions, let him be advised not to give himself immoderately to prayer, watchings, fasts and penances, so as to injure his head or chest, or weaken bodily strength and damage his health; as many often do, to very serious loss in their spiritual life, since they thus unfit themselves to continue the course upon which they have entered. The Confessor should therefore require of the penitent that he be entirely open, and submit himself in all things to the direction of his guide.

206. Second suggestion. If the penitent find himself dry and desolate in his meditations, the Director should endeavour to trace the origin of such desolation. According to Cassian, desolation has three sources:—First, our own negligence; Second, the assaults of the devil; Third, the dealings of God with us, for the trial or purification of the soul.* With regard to the first of these causes, the Director must examine whether the darkness of the mind and the barrenness of the heart which he discovers in the person under his direction, have their origin in notable negligence or fault, into which the penitent may have fallen with unusual frequency, or in some extraordinary dissipation of mind, especially in self-complacency, vanity, or pride: for, as St. Bernard has it, this is the usual reason why God withholds sensible graces. The Saint's words are, "Pride has been found in me, and the Lord has turned away in anger from His servant. Hence this barrenness of soul, this want of devotion, from which I am suffering. I cannot be moved to tears, so great is the hardness of my heart. The Psalms please me no longer; I care not to read; I take no delight in prayer, my accustomed meditations come back to me no more. Where is that intoxication of spirit, that serenity of soul,

* Tripartita nobis super hâc, quam dicitis, sterilitate mentis, tradita ratio est. Aut enim de negligentiâ nostrâ, aut de impugnatione diaboli, aut de dispensatione Dei, ac probatione, descendit. Coll. iv., cap. 3.

that joy and peace, which I have felt in the Holy Ghost, the Comforter?" *

207. If, then, the Director find in his penitent such faults as make God hide His face, he must set about procuring their effectual amendment. Thus, if he discover that pride is the occasion, or vanity, he should give his penitent the knowledge of self as subject of meditation, and make him continue it until he has formed a low estimate of himself and has attained a true feeling of humility. For this purpose he will find much assistance in the meditations developed by F. Pinamonti, in his golden little book, entitled "The Mirror that deceives not." For there is in fact only too much truth in what is said by the Saint whom we but just now quoted. "My own experience has taught me that there is no means so effectual for earning the grace of consolation, for preserving it when gained, for recovering it when lost, as to stand before God with head bowed down, and to be ever fearful for oneself. *Blessed is the man that ever feareth.* Fear then, when grace shall smile upon thee; fear when it departs; fear when it shall return anew: this indeed is to be ever in fear."†

208. As to the second cause, search must be made whether the penitent is depressed with empty fears, or afflicted with scruples, or cast down with diffidence, troubled with baseless apprehensions, assailed with impure temptations, or agitated by other inward troubles; for if this be the case, the aridity must be ascribed to the devil. For the wicked one, darkening the mind and disturbing the heart with such vile suggestions, indisposes the soul to receive the peaceful, calm, and sweet impressions of divine grace. In such cases the Director will employ

* Superbia inventa est in me, et Dominus declinavit in irâ a servo suo. Hinc ista sterilitas animæ meæ et devotionis inopia, quam patior . . . Non compungi ad lacrymas queo, tanta est duritia cordis: non sapit psalmus; non legere libet; non orare delectat; meditationes solitas non invenio. Ubi illa inebriatio spiritus? ubi mentis serenitas, et gaudium et pax in Spiritu Sancto? Serm. 54, In Cant.

† In veritate didici nihil æque efficax esse ad gratiam promerendam, retinendam, recuperandam, quam si omni tempore coram Deo inveniaris, non altum sapere, sed timere; *Beatus homo, qui semper est pavidus.* Time ergo, cum arriserit gratia; time cum abierit; time cum denuo revertetur; et hoc est semper pavidum esse. S. Bern., Loco supracit.

the remedies usually adopted as fittest to meet the suggestions of the enemy.

209. But if he discover in his penitent neither serious faults of vain self-complacency, nor the disturbance occasioned by diabolical suggestions, he must ascribe the withdrawal of sensible devotion to God, Who, in order to purify the soul, frequently casts it into a state of painful dryness. Nor is this to be wondered at, since by means of this darkness of mind and hardness of heart, the soul becomes detached from all spiritual consolations, and accustoms itself to serve God, not for the gratification it finds in His service, but out of pure love for Him; in short, forms the habit of serving God alone; and in this, if we consider it aright, pure and really unselfish love consists. Further, during this time of trial, the soul, if it remains faithful, grows in solid virtues, since under such circumstances acts of patience, mortification, humility, obedience and the like, do not proceed from the heart urged on by certain sensible affections—the fruits that spring from grace—but solely from the motive proper to such virtues. Hence, at such times of aridity, those good habits are formed which remain permanently rooted in the soul, and enable the person to act virtuously, under all circumstances, whether of prosperity or adversity.

210. The Director will take special care not to allow a penitent suffering from aridity to be troubled, to lose heart, and, least of all, to omit his usual meditations. Let him engage the sufferer to humble himself under the mighty hand of God, calmly acknowledging and confessing, with all simplicity of heart, his own helplessness and misery, and firmly cleaving to the belief that God works all things for his good; so that he may be resigned to the divine will, and offer himself readily to remain in this state even throughout his life, should it seem good to God so to dispose for His own glory and the profit of His creature. Let the sufferer have firm trust that the divine goodness will never forsake him, unless he first forsake God; and on this account let him rest assured that although the Lord no longer, as in the beginning, gives him tokens of His presence, yet He secretly assists, protects and defends him, and even looks upon him with

the eye of a Father. The Director must further bear in mind that these same acts should be made, when dryness and darkness visit us for either of the two other reasons above mentioned; since such desolation which proceeds from our own failings and the assaults of the devil, is intended by God, if not as a punishment, at least as a purification of the soul: hence, when suffering for such reasons from aridity, we should humble ourselves before God, conform ourselves to His will, and trust implicitly in Him.

211. The Director will often hear complaints from persons who suffer from desolation, that, in time of prayer, they are like statues, or mere blocks of stone; that they seem to themselves not to be praying at all, but to be on their knees staring at the walls. He will reply, that they should be glad to be as statues in the presence of God, and to give Him pleasure even in this form. He should tell them to rejoice that they are admitted to be as stones in the sight of the Lord, remembering that He takes pleasure in the very want of feeling of which they complain, if only it be accompanied by due conformity to His will. Let them remain, then, gazing at the wall, like soldiers standing on guard in obedience to their king, so long as they bear in mind that God sees them when they are kneeling before Him, and so long as they cease not to turn towards Him by acts of their will, as well as they are able, however such acts may seem to them dry, constrained and valueless. I say *seem to them*, for these forced acts, made by the will in such circumstances, are often more precious in God's eyes than certain fervid, sweet and ardent emotions which, at other times, are felt in the sensitive part of the soul.

212. Palladius, a bishop of Cappadocia, in the life which he wrote of St. Macarius of Alexandria, relates, that he went one day, all full of faint-heartedness and alarm, to visit this saintly recluse, and said to him, "How am I to act, holy Father, when my thoughts continually torment me, seeming to say, 'What are you doing in this cell? You waste your time in this desert; go and associate with the rest of mankind'?" St. Macarius replied, "When such thoughts return, answer them thus: For Christ's

sake I keep guard over the walls of this cell."* The Director may give the like answer to his penitents who tell him that they cannot do anything in time of meditation; that they only stare at the walls, and lose their time; that it would be better for them to take up some other occupation: and the like. Let him tell them to answer these suggestions of their self-love, or of the evil one, thus: "We are here looking at these walls for Christ's sake." At the same time they should lift up their souls to God in lowly resignation, performing some act of prayer, a thing which no dryness, however great it be, can hinder them from doing.

ARTICLE VI.

Fifth means of acquiring Christian Perfection. Mental and vocal Prayer.

CHAPTER I.

THAT WITHOUT PRAYER IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO ATTAIN TO ETERNAL SALVATION, AND MUCH LESS TO PERFECTION.

213. WE have now ascended two steps of the ladder which St. Bernard made to lead souls to perfection and to God; and these steps are spiritual reading and the meditation of divine things. It remains now to mount to the third round, which is the prayer of supplication and petition, in which is most strictly fulfilled the well-known saying of St. John Damascene, that prayer is the begging of God for that which is suitable for us.† St. Bernard says: "Meditation shows us with its light what we stand in need of; the prayer of petition obtains it. The former prepares the road of perfection; the latter leads us safely along our road. By

* Ille respondit: Dic ipsis cogitationibus tuis: Propter Christum parietes cellæ istius custodio. Apud Surium, tom. I.

† Oratio est petitio decentium a Deo.

meditation we become aware of the dangers that threaten us; by prayer we escape them.* By which is meant that meditation is necessary to us in so far as, making us aware of our needs, it moves us to ask and obtain of God whatever is necessary. Having treated of mental prayer in the foregoing Article, we have now to speak of the prayer of petition, since without this the former would not be an effectual means of attaining to the perfection on which we are bent. But since we may implore God's mercies both by the mind and heart without moving the tongue, and also by spoken words—as is customary with all good Christians—it is necessary for us to consider these two ways of praying and setting forth our needs to Almighty God. Beginning then with the first-named method, we will show, in the present Chapter, that without the prayer of petition it is impossible to attain to salvation, and still more so to attain to it with that perfection which belongs to the special subject of our book.

214. This is the express teaching of the Angelic Doctor, whose words we now quote: "After Baptism" (and the same holds good of Confession, whereby we recover the baptismal gift), "man stands in need of constant prayer, in order to enter into the kingdom of heaven, for, though by baptism sins are washed away, there yet remains the incentive to sin which attacks us from within, while the devil and the world assail us from without. Hence it is expressly noted in St. Luke, that while Jesus was praying, after having been baptized, the heavens were immediately opened, that we might understand how necessary to the baptized is that prayer which opens to us also the gates of heaven, and prepares for us an entrance into that blessed country." The holy Doctor teaches this same truth in another place, when he observes, that after a

* Meditatio docet quid desit; oratio, ne desit, obtinet. Illa viam ostendit, ista deducit; meditatione denique cognoscimus imminentia nobis pericula, oratione evadimus. Serm. 2, In Festo S. Andreæ.

† Post baptismum autem necessaria est hominis jugis oratio, ad hoc quod cœlum introeat: licet enim per baptismum remittantur peccata, remanet fomes peccati, nos impugnans interius; et mundus et dæmones, qui impugnant exterius. Et ideo signanter dicitur Lucæ iij, quod Jesu baptizato, et orante, apertum est cœlum; quia scilicet fidelibus necessaria est oratio post baptismum. 3 part., q. 39, art. 5, in corp.

man has been justified by the gift of grace, he must, of necessity, ever pray and beg the gift of perseverance, to the end that God may keep him from the evil of sin to the very end of his days.*

215. To be fully convinced of this firmly-established doctrine, we must next lay bare the foundations, and examine whether they have a solid support. The foundation-stones are the two following truths, which are no less certain than important to be known. The first truth is, that apart from God's special assistance, we cannot continue long in His friendship, free from deadly sin of any kind; for so many are the internal impulses of our passions inciting us to evil, so great is the attraction and fascination by which outward objects allure us to what is wrong, so many are the attacks which our hellish foes bring to bear upon us in order to hurl us into sin, that the brittle clay of which we are formed cannot withstand all these shocks; and unless the almighty hand of God protect us with His grace, we must necessarily fall into some grievous offence. And, furthermore, to remain in God's friendship, we are obliged to perform various good and holy works which His law commands us to perform. Now, unless we mean to partake in the abominable heresy of the Pelagians, we are bound to own that this is possible to us only by special assistance of divine grace. If ever we have observed a boat in the middle of a strong and rapid current, we must have noticed what great strength of arm, and what exertion on the part of the rowers, are needed to carry it against the stream to its destination; but, that it may be borne away and swamped by the current, all that the boatmen have to do is, to cease plying their oars. And exactly in the same manner, in order to make for the port of everlasting bliss, against the stream of our passions, the allurements of the world, the temptations of the devil, how much striving on our part, and grace on the side of God, are needed by us! But to drift into sin and perdition, we have only to be forsaken of grace, and left to the weakness of our own frail nature. All this is a simple truth of the Catholic faith, defined

* Postquam aliquis est justificatus per gratiam, necesse habet a Deo petere perseverantiæ donum, ut scilicet custodiatur a malo usque ad finem vitæ. 1 2 qu. 199, art. 10, in corp.

by the Holy Council of Trent, when it teaches that, in order to gain the grace of God and to persevere in it, we must be helped by His special assistance.*

216. The second truth we have to establish is this: that the above-mentioned grace and aid, so necessary to maintain us in God's favour, and to help us to the possession of everlasting life, towards which all our desires tend, are usually withheld from him who seeks it not in prayer. Such is the express teaching of St. Augustine: "We believe that none can start upon the road to salvation, unless invited by the prevenient grace of God; that no one pursues the path and works out his salvation, unless encouraged by the helping grace of God; that no one can merit or receive such graces and such helps, except by means of supplication and constant petition."†

217. Divines infer from this, that we are all under a grave obligation to pray, especially in times of grievous temptation, and in circumstances of danger. Indeed, they further add, we are bound to this, not only by the divine positive precept, but by the natural law itself; because, presupposing that we have the light of faith, reason itself dictates that we are bound to make use of the means necessary to save ourselves from everlasting ruin. But it must be plain to every one that the chief of these means is to beseech and obtain the help of God.

218. The Angelic Doctor is, of all divines, the most emphatic in his assertion and proof of the gravity of this obligation of praying for necessary aid. He affirms as certain in several of his works, that "every one is obliged to use the prayer of petition, for the very reason that every one is bound to gain for himself those spiritual gifts which can be given by no one but God alone, nor obtained from Him except by way of earnest petition."‡ And in his answer to the third objection which he makes to himself,

* Sess. vj. De Justif., can. 1, 2 et 22.

† Nullum credimus ad salutem, nisi Deo invitante, venire; nullum invitatum salutem suam, nisi Deo auxiliante, operari; nullum, nisi orantem, auxilium promereri. Lib. De Eccles. Dogm., cap. 57.

‡ Ad orationem quilibet homo tenetur ex hoc ipso, quod tenetur ad bona spiritualia sic procuranda, quæ nonnisi divinitus dantur: unde alio modo procurari non possunt, nisi ab ipso petantur. In iv. Sent. Dist. 15, art. 1. q. 3.

he implies the same truth: "Prayer is necessary, and even of strict obligation, in regard to whatever the will is bound to perform in order that we may attain our last end."*

219. St. John Chrysostom illustrates by a striking and most apt comparison, the grave obligation we all lie under, of unceasingly begging God to help us. "Take a fish out of the water," says the Saint, "and shortly you will see it expire under your very eyes. In the same manner, cease, yourself, from prayer, you too will soon die to grace and to God; for what water is to the bodily life of a fish, that prayer is to man's spiritual life."† Now, as a fish, if endowed with faith and reason, would be under a grave obligation not to leave the element which is essential to the preservation of its life; so, a Christian is bound not to forsake prayers, supplications, and petitions, on which depend both the life of grace in this world, and that of a glorious immortality in the world to come.

220. To the arguments of reason and the authority of the holy Fathers, I am anxious to add the irrefragable authority of Holy Scripture, which, in frequent passages, recommends to us the practice of prayer, and shows clearly how urgent is the need which all have of it, giving us to understand, in the most urgent and expressive terms, how great is our obligation to be exceedingly ready to adopt it. Our Blessed Lord, in His Holy Gospel, proclaims most unmistakably that we must pray always, without ceasing.‡ St. John Chrysostom, commenting on the word *oportet* (*we must*), says that it implies necessity, and signifies that whosoever would be saved, must persist in prayer.§ Our dear Lord returns to this point in another place, warning us that we must *watch and pray*, at all times, and in all circumstances.‖ And in St. Matthew, He

* Oratio necessaria est, et sub præcepto cadens respectu eorum, quorum voluntas sub necessitate prædictâ cadit.

† Quod si teipsum destitueris precatione, perinde feceris, ac si piscem ex aquis extraxeris: ut enim pisci vita est aqua, ita tibi precatio. Lib. ij. De Orando Deum.

‡ Oportet semper orare et non deficere. Lucæ xviij. 1.

§ Dum *oportet* dicit, necessitatem inducit. Tom. 1. Serm. de Moyse.

‖ Vigilate, omni tempore orantes. Lucæ xxj. 36.

again repeats, *Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.** In like terms does the Apostle of the nations recommend persevering prayer: *Pray without ceasing; at all times give thanks, for such is the will of God in Jesus Christ for all of you.*† In the Epistle to the Ephesians he tells them, *Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit (which is the word of God); beseeching always with prayer and supplication from the heart.*‡ To the Colossians he says, *Be instant in prayer.*§ St. Peter, the Prince of the Apostles, inculcates the same lesson: *Be prudent and watch in prayer.*‖ And the author of Ecclesiasticus warns us, *Let nothing hinder thee from praying always, and delay not until death to be justified.*¶

221. Now, who can doubt that a thing inculcated in the Divine Scriptures, at so many times, in so many ways, and in so urgent a manner, is imposed upon us by the rigorous command of God? Who can question that prayer is an instrument of the highest necessity and indispensable to eternal salvation, when God wills that we should employ it with such frequency, so perseveringly, and without any notable intermission of time? We must needs conclude, then, with St. John Chrysostom, that "It is a most clear proof of folly not to be sensible of the greatness of the honour of converse with Almighty God, not to love the practice of prayer, not to be persuaded that to neglect prostrating ourselves frequently before God and asking His aid, is to bring upon ourselves death to grace in this life, and eternal death in the life to come."**

* Vigilitate et orate, ut non intretis in tentationem. Cap. xxvj. 41.

† Sine intermissione orate. In omnibus gratias agite: hæc enim est voluntas Dei in Christo Jesu in omnibus vobis. Thessal. 1, v. 17, 18.

‡ Galeam salutis assumite, et gladium spiritûs (quod est verbum Dei), per omnem orationem, et obsecrationem orantes omni tempore in spiritu. Cap. vj. 18.

§ Orationi instate. Cap. iv. 2.

‖ Estote prudentes, et vigilate in orationibus. Cap. iv. 7.

¶ Non impediaris orare semper, et non verearis usque ad mortem justificari. Eccli. xviij. 22.

** Evidentissimum est amentiæ argumentum, non intelligere magnitudinem hujus honoris, nec amare deprecandi studium, nec hoc habere persuasum, quod animæ mors sit, non provolvi ad Dei genua. Lib 1, De Orando Deum.

222. From this the reader may easily understand why the devil has such a hatred of prayer, and uses so many artifices and stratagems to alienate the minds of the faithful from it, by exciting, in some persons, thoughts of vanity, and in others, filthy imaginings; by inspiring some with annoyance and disgust, others with diffidence, scruples and groundless alarms. The wicked one knows full well that prayer is the main remedy for all our spiritual disorders. He knows that herein lies our only security for the attainment of eternal blessings. He knows that as they who are constant in prayer are morally certain of their salvation, so there is a moral certainty of the final ruin of such as live in the constant neglect of it; and therefore he spares no effort to destroy the habit, and uses every evil stratagem to render it burdensome, disagreeable, and all but insupportable to the faithful. St. Gregory relates that in one of the monasteries founded by the Blessed Patriarch Benedict, there was a monk who never could remain quiet and fixed in prayer. He had scarce knelt down with the brethren to pray, before he got up and went out of the Church or Choir, wearied to death, and went sauntering about, with eyes and mind alike wandering upon any and every object. This great fault was at length reported to St. Benedict by Pompeianus, the Abbot of the monastery, and the monk was severely reprimanded, but without any good coming of the reproof, since, after a couple of days, he began again to leave the Church and Oratory, and like a stray sheep to wander about, far from the devout pasture-land of holy prayer. St. Benedict being informed of this wilful disobedience, came in person in order to put an effectual remedy to so grievous a scandal; and when the office had been sung in choir, and the other monks were applying themselves to prayer, he saw the devil, in the shape of a black and deformed man, lay hold of the skirt of this monk's habit and draw him out of the choir. "Do you not see," said the Saint, to the Abbot and to Maurus, his favourite disciple, "who it is that withdraws our unhappy brother from prayer?" "No," they replied, "we see nothing." Then the three had recourse to prayer, after which God gave St. Maurus also the power to see the fiend under the above-mentioned horrible form, holding on to the clothes of the unhappy religious. The following day,

St. Benedict, meeting the monk out of the choir, as usual, in time of prayer, chastised him severely, striking him with a rod. These strokes put the enemy to flight, nor did he return to molest the monk; as if (St. Gregory observes) the fiend himself had been smitten by these saintly hands.* It pleased God that, in this case, St. Benedict should behold in visible form what the devil is every day working invisibly in the hearts of the faithful, and should see how he withdraws them from prayer and supplication by a thousand artifices and a thousand unseen contrivances, with which he influences their minds.

223. But what Cæsarius relates† has made a more lasting impression on my mind, showing as it does the abhorrence in which our common enemy holds prayer, and what lengths he will go to hinder it. The devil having appeared to a military man, in the shape of a comely, handsome youth, and having offered to be his servant, was received by him into his house, and began to wait upon him with so much punctuality, faithfulness, promptitude and cheerfulness, that the master was as much astonished as pleased with the servant. The officer chanced once to be surrounded by a body of the enemy's troops, in a place which left no means of escape, and the newly-engaged servant extricated him by showing him a ford across the bed of a very deep river. His wife, having fallen grievously ill, and having been given up by the physicians, who despaired of her life, the pretended servant said to his master, "Put the case into my hands; I will soon find a remedy that shall cure her immediately." He set out, and in an hour's time returned, bringing a supply of milk from a lioness. His master, wondering, inquired where he could have found so rare a draught within so brief a space of time. "I went," said the attendant, "to the mountains of Arabia, and entering one of the dens where these animals dwell, I obtained it in this manner." Hereupon the master conceived a grave suspicion that all was not right, and said with determination, "You must let me know who you are." The devil, not wanting to discover himself, tried

* Sicque, antiquus hostis dominari non est ausus in ejus cogitatione, ac si ipse percussus esset ex verbere. Dial., Lib. ij., cap. 3.

† Miracul., lib. v., cap. 36.

to evade the question, but being further pressed by the officer's repeated interrogations, at length answered that he was one of those unhappy spirits who with Lucifer were hurled down from heaven. Horror-struck at these words, the officer said, "If you are the devil, depart at once from me and from this house. Your service is good, but you do not suit me." "I will go," said the deceitful spirit, "but I want you to pay me my wages for my long service;" and then he asked for five pieces only of silver money. The officer handed them to him directly, thinking that it was but a very poor compensation for the service performed. The demon took them, and returning one piece, begged him to lay it out on a bell to be hung in the tower of a certain country church, to call the people to Mass, and other divine offices on Sundays and festivals. I fancy I can see the bewilderment of the reader, who will be puzzled how to account for so much zeal for God's glory on the part of a declared enemy. But let him wait awhile, and he will be convinced that the devil's implacable hatred for prayer, and not zeal for God's honour, was the motive which induced him to make such a request; because, before the bell was put up, the villagers, fearful of losing Mass, used to go betimes to church, and to spend the interval of waiting in prayer; but after it was hung in its place, they came only when they heard the signal. Thus, though the demon is the father of pride, he was content to spend many years in humble, toilsome service, for the purpose of putting a stop to the few additional prayers which these peasants were accustomed to recite. If such are his endeavours to hinder the faithful from prayer, it is a sign that he clearly sees how necessary a means is prayer to eternal salvation, and how the neglect of it leads to everlasting ruin.

224. Without going further, I think I have sufficiently proved the second part of the assertion with which I began the present Chapter,—namely, that it is utterly impossible to attain to Christian perfection without prayer; for perfection requires us to keep not only the commandments, but also the counsels; not merely to avoid grievous sin, but even lesser faults. And what is more to the purpose, it supposes us to aim at uprooting every vice or evil habit, to moderate our passions, to acquire the moral virtues,

and, above all, to gain charity, wherein perfection mainly consists, the which being very difficult, requires a special aid of divine grace, and consequently that we apply ourselves unceasingly to prayer and supplication. Let the reader listen to St. John Chrysostom, who says expressly, "I deem it plain to every one, that it is absolutely impossible, without the help of prayer, to live virtuously, and thus to persevere in goodness throughout our life. For, how can any one lead a virtuous life unless he continually draw nigh to, and suppliantly call upon, Him, Who alone can impart goodness to man?"*

225. In another passage, the holy Doctor sets forth the same impossibility by a very apt comparison. He says, "If any one would assert that prayer and devout supplication are to the soul what the sinews are to the body, I would go with him. For as our bodily frame is made up of the sinews, and by them knit together, and moved, and made suitable for all the operations that constitute our life; so, in the same way, all the vigour and activity of the soul is founded on prayer. In prayer the soul receives strength for acts of virtue, and is enabled to run with speed along the road of piety and perfection. And, as it suffices that but one sinew should be cut, to destroy the frame-work of the body, so that nothing but a helpless trunk should remain; in like manner, when deprived of prayer, the soul loses its balance, strays from the path of virtue, and becomes incapable of doing good."† Let no one, therefore, hope for salvation, still less for perfection, who is not determined to be constant in the frequent exercise of prayer, of petition, and of repeated supplication, for every need of his soul.

* Arbitror cunctis esse manifestum, quod simpliciter impossibile sit, absque precationis præsidio, cum virtute degere, cumque hâc hujus vitæ cursum peragere. Etenim quî fiat, ut quis virtutem exerceat, nisi continenter adeat, et supplex ad genua accedat ei, qui virtutem omnem suppeditat, et largitur hominibus? Lib. I, De Orando Deum.

† Jam vero si quis dicat, animæ nervos esse deprecationem, meâ quidem sententiâ videtur verum dicere. Quemadmodum enim corpus nervis cohæret, currit, vivit, stat, et compactum est; adeo ut si nervos incideris universam corporis harmoniam dissolvis; itidem animæ per sanctas preces sibi constant et compinguntur, ac pietatis cursum facile peragunt. Lib. ij. De Orando Deum.

CHAPTER II.

WHAT THINGS SHOULD FORM THE OBJECTS OF OUR PRAYER.

226. The principal objects of our prayer, says St Thomas,* are spiritual benefits, which are the only real good of the soul, making us absolutely good, and leading us to the highest good, that is to everlasting happiness. To these spiritual benefits, then, should our desires, and with them our petitions, be mainly directed. St. Bernard, treating of the things that we should at all times and unceasingly ask for, with all the strength and affection of our hearts —of such things, in a word, as ought to form the main purpose of our petitions—names none but such as are supernatural and divine; as, for instance, to live in the grace of God, to be pleasing in His sight, to enjoy His glory for evermore, to live and to die with Him. Such too are the demands Tobias taught his beloved son to make continually and on every occasion: *My son*, said he, *bless God at all times, and desire of Him to direct thy ways, and that all thy counsels may abide in Him.*† And indeed such should be the petitions addressed to God by every Christian soul, especially by such as aspire to perfection, for on this depends all our progress. In all our prayers, embarrassments, perils and needs, these are the things for which we should pray, absolutely, and without any limitation or condition; as they are goods which we cannot misuse, and from which we need not fear that evil will result. This observation we borrow from St. Thomas.‡

227. Temporal blessings may also form the object of our prayer, but, as St. Thomas again teaches, in a secondary and subordinate manner,§ for Christ says expressly, *Seek first the kingdom of*

* 2, 2, q. 83, a. 6, in corp.

† Omni tempore benedic Deum, et pete ab eo, ut vias tuas dirigat, et omnia consilia tua in ipso permaneant. Tob., iv. 20.

‡ Sunt tamen quædam bona, quibus homo male uti non potest, quæ scilicet malum eventum habere non possunt. Hæc autem sunt, quibus beatificamur, et quibus beatitudinem meremur; quæ quidem Sancti orando absolute petunt. 2, 2, q. 84, art. 5, in corp.

§ Art. 6 supræ.

God and His justice, and all these things shall be added unto you * As much as to say, that the kingdom of God and all that stands in connection with it, must be our first aim in our devotions, and that all else must be sought for as merely accessory to this supreme end. This meaning is given by St. Gregory the Great to the text just quoted. "For in that He does not say *shall be given*, but *shall be added to you*, He plainly shows that what is given as principal, is one thing, and what is added over and above, is another. For while we use time, we ought to aim at eternity. Eternity is promised, and time is given in addition."† St. Augustine explains the text as follows: "In saying that the kingdom of God is to be sought for in the first place, He means that temporal goods are to be asked in order of dignity, not of time. The kingdom of heaven is our chiefest good; temporal blessings are necessary—necessary that is, to secure our chiefest good."‡ And hence we may, without any imperfection, pray for temporal blessings, but as secondary and subordinate; blessings accessory to those spiritual gifts which alone are closely connected with our supernatural end, which is life everlasting. It was thus that Isaac prayed unto the Lord for his wife, who was barren; and the Lord hearkened to him, and Rebecca conceived.§ So, too, did Anna, the childless wife of Elcana, entreat God, and obtain from Him a son.‖ And King Ezechias, when sick unto death, and forbidden by a divine message to harbour any hope of life, besought the

* Primum quærite regnum Dei, et justitiam ejus; et hæc omnia adjicientur vobis. Matt. vj. 33.

† Qui enim non ait dabuntur, sed *adjicientur*, profecto indicat aliud esse quod principaliter datur, aliud quod superadditur. Quia enim nobis in intentione æternitas, in usu vero temporalitas esse debet, et illud datur, et hoc nimirum ex abundanti superadditur. Moral. 13, c. 47.

‡ Cum dixit illud primo (*quærendum esse, scilicet regnum Dei*), significavit quia hoc posterius quærendum est: non tempore, sed dignitate: illud tamquam bonum nostrum, hoc tamquam necessarium nostrum: necessarium autem propter illud bonum. De Serm. Dom. in Monte, c. 16.

§ Deprecatusque est Isaac Dominum pro uxore suâ, eo quod esset sterilis: qui exaudivit eum, et dedit conceptum Rebeccæ. Gen. xxv. 21.

‖ Pro puero isto oravi, et dedit mihi Dominus petitionem meam, quam postulavi eum. I. Reg. i. 27.

Lord for health, and recovered.* And the Holy Scriptures abound with innumerable instances of persons seeking for and obtaining temporal blessings from the goodness of the Almighty.

228. But whatsoever is incompatible with our soul's health, or the honour due to God, cannot, on any account, be the lawful object of our prayers; since such prayers are, in God's sight, a mere tempting of Him, and, far from awakening pity, only provoke wrath. Hence St. Augustine says, that there are certain things which it would be a mercy to withhold, for they are injurious, but God sometimes grants them in vengeance, irritated at our rashness in having petitioned for them.† We read in the life of St. Thomas of Canterbury, that a certain lady, desirous of having peculiarly bright eyes, in order to be more attractive and handsome, vowed to go barefooted to the tomb of the Saint, to obtain, by his means, so silly a favour. She fulfilled her vow, and falling prostrate before the shrine of the Saint, set forth her petition; but on arising from her ridiculous prayer found that she had entirely lost her sight: nor was it without many supplications that she was able to return to her home with that eyesight which she brought to the tomb of the holy martyr:‡—a meet punishment indeed for such foolish hardihood.

229. Hence we may learn, that as we cannot tell whether the temporal favours we ask for, will be advantageous or prejudicial to our souls, whether they will redound to the glory of God, or turn to His dishonour, it behoves us to pray for them under condition of their being expedient both to our own welfare and to the honour of our Maker. Such is the doctrine of St. Thomas.§ For God is the physician of our souls, and it belongs to the physician, rather than to the patient, to determine what will best promote health. Hence God, acting in virtue of His foreknowledge, may be dealing mercifully with us in granting our requests,

* Hæc dicit Dominus Deus David patris tui. Audivi orationem tuam, et lacrymas tuas, et ecce sanavi te. IV. Reg. xx. 5.

† Metuendum est, ne, quod posset non dare propitius, det iratus. Tract 73 in Joan.

‡ Jacobus Genuens. In Vitâ.

§ Eo tenore a Deo petimus ipsa, ut nobis concedantur secundum quod expediunt ad salutem. 2, 2, q. 83, art. 6. ad. 4.

or be treating us with still greater mercy in rejecting them. So, in order not to go astray, we should make such demands conditionally, casting ourselves with indifference and resignation of heart upon His loving care for us: nor ought this prayer for such blessings to be as fervent and earnest as that which we make for spiritual goods, as though we had more esteem for our temporal than for our eternal interests. Thus, according to Surius, the holy martyr St. Fulgentius, whenever he prayed for the sick, the afflicted, or those weighed down by bodily ills, used always to add this limitation, "However, Thou knowest, O Lord, what is most advantageous to the welfare of our souls."*

230. We have now to examine whether the needs of our neighbours should be the object of our prayers; in other words, whether we ought to pray not only for our own wants, but for those of others. The answer is plain. There can be no doubt but that we are bound to pray for one another, and by our prayers to procure for each other life everlasting; for this is commanded by the Apostle St. James:† *Pray one for another, that ye may be saved.* St. John Chrysostom indeed adds further, that the prayers which we offer for others are more pleasing to God, and therefore gain more merit for ourselves, than those which we make on our own behalf, as they receive a special lustre and price, gilded as they are with fraternal charity. "We are compelled," he says, "by necessity to pray for ourselves; but the love of our brethren engages us to pray for others also. Now, far more acceptable to God is the prayer that proceeds not from the pressure of our wants, but from the love of our neighbour."‡

231. There is one only difficulty which has the power to lessen the fervour of such prayers, and it is, that we are not so certain to obtain what we ask for, when we pray for others, as when we pray for ourselves; because we cannot be sure, as St. Thomas

* Preces suas sub hâc conditione fundebat: Scis, Domine, quid animarum nostrarum saluti conveniat. Tom. 1, Die 1, Mens. Januar.

† Orate pro invicem ut salvemini. Jac. v. 16.

‡ Pro se orare necessitas cogit; pro altero autem caritas fraternitatis hortatur. Dulcior autem ante Deum est oratio, non quam necessitas transmittit, sed quam caritas fraternitatis commendat. Homil. 14, in Matth.

holds, that he for whom we intercede will not put some obstacle in the way of obtaining the effect of our petitions, and will not thus render them fruitless.* But this should not make us at all less ready to pray for our neighbours, or in any way cool the fervour of our charity. First, because, though the want of proper dispositions, and the obstacles which this places in the way of the good effect of our prayer, may prevent our petitions being of use to them, our supplications on their behalf are nevertheless very meritorious in our own case, nor shall we lose the reward of the charitable acts which we have performed for their benefit. Thus, St. Thomas, commenting on the words of the Psalm, *And my prayer shall return into my own bosom*, says, "that is, though it avail others nothing, I myself shall not be deprived of my reward."†

232. The second reason is this, that if we are constant in our intercession for our neighbour, however indisposed he may be, our prayers will, at length, clear away the obstacles which are being placed in the way of their fulfilment, and thus we shall dispose the person to receive the graces we are anxious to obtain from God, and shall accomplish our purpose to the full. Numberless instances might be alleged in proof of this truth; but, among the great number that occur to me, I select two, which in my opinion are most apposite and most authentic.‡ Henry, brother of the King of France, went to Clairvaux to consult St. Bernard on some secular business. He had scarcely entered the sacred enclosure, before the calm of the solitude, the unaffected cheerfulness which shone on the countenances of the monks, the sweetness of the words that fell from the lips of the saintly Abbot and his companions, made such an impression upon him, that, spurning the court, palace, and princely splendour, he begged to be admitted to the habit, which he put on without a moment's

* Pro se orare ponitur conditio orationis, non quidem necessaria ad effectum merendi, sed sicut necessaria ad effectum impetrandi. Contingit enim quandoque, quod oratio pro alio facta non impetret, etiamsi fiat pie, perseveranter, et de pertinentibus ad salutem, propter impedimentum, quod est ex parte ejus pro quo oratur. 2, 2, q. 83, a. 7, ad 7.

† Oratio mea in sinu meo convertetur: id est, etsi eis non prosit, ego tamen non sum frustratus meâ mercede. In Psalm. xxxiv. 13.

‡ Cæsarius, Lib. i., cap. 19.

delay. A change so extraordinary and unforeseen astounded all the gentlemen of his train, and they began with loud cries and lamentations to mourn for their master as for one dead. And in truth he was dead to the world. Among their number was a Parisian, Andrew by name, who, being well-nigh bereft of his senses on account of the vehemence of his grief, burst into a frenzy of passion, and called his master drunkard, fool, madman; sparing neither curses nor abuse. Henry, seeing that he was more agitated than the rest, begged St. Bernard to pray, and obtain his conversion. "Doubt not," replied the Saint, "but that one day he too will be one of ourselves;" and as he repeated several times this assurance, even before Andrew, the latter, foaming with rage and aversion for St. Bernard, said within himself (as he afterwards bore witness), "Now I know you are no prophet, but an impostor, for I am fully certain that I shall never put on the religious habit as you predict." Then he took his leave, calling upon heaven to make the monastery a heap of ruins, and send forth lightnings to destroy the inmates. Now, I ask the reader, could a soul be less disposed for the grace of vocation and admission to the religious state? Assuredly not. But behold the power of prayer, although offered for others, and not for self. That night St. Bernard and his monks prayed for this unhappy man, and as they were praying, the darkness that was spread over the mind of the courtier began gradually to vanish, and his hard heart to soften: then he began to love what he had hitherto hated, and to long to gain for himself the very thing that he had so abhorred in others; till, unable to withstand the violence of the struggle which was taking place in his heart, he ran when morning dawned, to Clairvaux, and falling at the feet of St. Bernard besought him, to the astonishment of all, to be admitted as a member of the community. To his great delight, his request was granted. Thus do prayers in behalf of others, even though ill-disposed, surmount the hindrances put in the way of grace, and at length bring about the desired effects.

233. The other instance of the power of prayer for our neighbour is related by St. Gregory in his Dialogues. A certain youth, called Theodore, had been placed for his education in the

monastery over which the Saint presided; but with so bad a result, that, far from giving any sign of piety, he detested it, and was in the habit of turning it into ridicule. Having been struck down, in the flower of his age, by the plague which was then devastating Rome, he was soon reduced to the last extremity While the monks were standing around his bed, in order to assist him in his last moments, he began to cry out, "Away with you; all of you depart hence immediately. I am already given over to the infernal serpent to be devoured by him. My head is even now within his jaws. Hence! make haste, that he may finish what he has begun, and may no longer torture me with his fiery breath." At these words, the monks began to admonish him: "What are you saying, brother? Arm yourself against the enemy with the sign of the cross." "I cannot," he cried out, "for the serpent crushes me with his scaly folds. I cannot lift my arm." The monks then knelt down in prayer, and with sighs and tears, and striking of breasts, they besought mercy for the unhappy youth. Hereupon Theodore, growing more calm, began to exclaim, "Thank God! the hellish serpent, terrified by your prayers, has taken to flight. I wish to be converted, and abandon the life of the world. Henceforth I mean to lead a life of holiness." He kept his word; for God having allowed him to recover, he mended his ways, and having been tried in the furnace of affliction, died a very holy death.* Let us tarry awhile to reflect upon this history. No soul could have been less disposed for entering into life everlasting. The unhappy man had been given up as beyond all hope; the devil had already laid hold of him, and had, so to say, begun to devour him. Yet prayer cleared away every obstacle to salvation, drove away the demon, softened the hard heart of a great sinner, disposed him to a true repentance, and won for him the desired end of eternal salvation.

234. We should, therefore, never weary of praying one for another, nor let our prayer be rendered lukewarm by the fear of the obstacles that are placed in the way of our petitions. For

* Reservatus ad vitam, toto ad Deum corde conversus est; et postquam mutatus in mentem, diu est flagellis attritus, tunc ejus anima carne soluta est. Lib. iv., cap. 38.

prayer overcomes every obstacle, and, as it is said by St. Ambrose in commenting on those words of the Apostle, *I beseech you, brethren, that you help me with your prayers for me to God,** it is impossible that the prayers of many united together, however lowly and imperfect they may be, should not eventually obtain from the Divine Goodness whatever may lawfully be asked for at the throne of grace.†

235. The reader will bear with me while I pass from considering the *object* of our prayers to a few short reflections upon the *subject*—that is, the person who offers them. This shall be done with the utmost brevity. He who prays should, of course, be in a state of grace, in the friendship and favour of God; as in this happy state he is better disposed to receive favours at the munificent hand of the Almighty: but should any one, to his most sad misfortune, have fallen away from the grace of God, on account of some mortal sin, he must not for this reason abstain from prayer, and frequent prayer too, since, whenever the favours for which he asks have reference to eternal salvation, and he pray for them with due dispositions, he will surely be heard; not indeed as a matter of right, as the Angelic Doctor rightly teaches; for, having fallen from grace, and being incapable of meriting, a person in mortal sin cannot exact anything of God as a matter of right; nevertheless he will be heard in pure mercy.‡ The reason of this is, as we learn from the same St. Thomas, that the efficacy of prayer rests not on the worthiness of him that prays, but on the goodness of God, on His word, on His promises.§ Hence, although the person praying be unworthy to be heard, yet shall his prayer avail him, provided that the things for which he asks be to his advantage, and that he pray as he ought. We may infer from this that no one should think himself exempted from the duty of prayer,

* Adjuvetis me in orationibus vestris. Ad Rom. xv. 30.

† Multi enim minimi, dum congregantur unanimes, fiunt magis; et multorum preces impossibile est quod non impetrent. In Comment. ad Ep. ad Rom.

‡ Orationem peccatoris, ex bono naturæ desiderio procedentem, Deus audit, non quasi ex justitiâ, quia peccator hoc non meretur, sed ex purâ misericordiâ. 2, 2, q. 83, a. 16 in corp.

§ Oratio in impetrando, non innititur meritis nostris, sed soli divinæ misericordiæ. Ibid. q. 7. art. 5.

whether he be in sin or in a state of grace, in the way of perfection or far from it, since prayer is a means adapted to, and necessary for, the wants of each and all.

CHAPTER III.

HOW MUCH THE PRAYER OF PETITION AVAILS TO OBTAIN FROM GOD WHAT WE DESIRE.

236. THERE is no exaggeration in the remark of St. John Climacus, that prayer offers a pleasing violence to the heart of God,* for God is not ashamed to declare Himself forced to yield to our petitions. So much so, that, constrained by the fervent pleadings of Moses, He said, "Let Me alone, withhold Me not, for My will is to let loose my wrath against this rebellious people of Mine. I am determined to destroy them."† And conscious of the great power of the prayer of Jeremias over His compassionate heart, the Almighty said to the Prophet: "Therefore, pray thou not for this guilty people on whom I mean to wreak My vengeance: nor withstand Me by thy petitions."‡ St. Jerome, commenting on these two texts, remarks, that the words which the Lord spake to the Prophet, "Withstand Me not," and to Moses, "Leave Me," show clearly that prayer has power to appease the divine wrath, and to force God to grant us peace and pardon.§

237. Should the reader now make inquiry, who has endowed prayer with the insuperable force which holds back the full torrent of the anger of the Most High, and constrains even the power of the Almighty to impart to us every blessing, provided only it be

* Oratio pia Deo vim infert.

† Dimitte me, ut irascatur furor meus contra eos, et deleam eos. Exod. c. xxxij. 10.

‡ Ergo noli orare pro populo hoc, nec assumas pro eis laudem et orationem, et non obsistas mihi. Jerem. vij. 16.

§ Quod autem dicit: Non obsistas mihi, illud ostendit, quod sanctorum preces iræ Dei possunt resistere; unde et Dominus loquitur ad Moysen: *Dimitte me.*

fitting and just? I will reply: that it is God Himself, who has bound Himself by His own word to grant us every favour which we beseech Him to bestow. Setting aside the promises so often repeated in the Old Testament, I confine myself to those which the Word made flesh has so frequently uttered in the New. *Ask*, says our Blessed Lord, *and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find: knock, and it shall be opened to you. For every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened.** Surely no promise could possibly be made in clearer or more express terms. *All whatsoever you shall ask in prayer, believe that you shall obtain it, and it shall be done unto you.* Of a certainty, Christ could not have pledged His word with greater clearness.† *Amen, I say unto you, if you ask the Father anything in My name, He will give it to you.*‡ Whereby Christ, not content, so to speak, with having pledged His own word, obliges Himself to fulfil it by giving His Eternal Father as an additional security.

238. Having thus bound Himself to give the graces we ask for at His hands, our most loving Redeemer proceeds to explain the reasons which urge Him to be thus gracious. All know the boundless extent of the mercy, the liberality, the goodness, the beneficence of our God; His longing to pour forth and impart to His creatures those immense treasures which He, as being the well-spring and fountain-head of every good gift, contains within Himself. So great is it, indeed, that St. Augustine believes it far to surpass all our desires, all our yearnings, hopes, and expectations; for God is more anxious to give than we are to receive, and He is much more desirous of showing mercy, than we are to be freed from our misery.§ And this is the very reason alleged by

* Petite, et dabitur vobis; quærite, et invenietis; pulsate, et aperietur vobis. Omnis enim qui petit, accipit; et qui quærit, invenit; et pulsanti aperietur. Luc. xj. 9, 10.

† Omnia quæcumque orantes petitis, credite, quia accipietis, et evenient vobis. Marc. xj. 24.

‡ Amen dico vobis, si quid Patrem petieritis in nomine meo, dabit vobis. Jo. xvj. 23.

§ Plus vult ille dare, quam nos accipere; plus vult misereri, quam nos a miseriâ liberari. Serm. 19, De Verb. Domini.

our Lord, when accounting for the influence of prayer on the heart of God. *And which of you, if he ask his father bread, will he give him a stone? or a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? or if he shall ask an egg, will he give him a scorpion? If you, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father from Heaven give the good Spirit to them that ask Him?** Truly, an overwhelming argument, fitted to bring home, even to the darkest mind, the conviction that it cannot be otherwise than that God will hearken to our requests concerning our soul's salvation and due degree of perfection, if only we present our petitions in a fit and proper manner.

239. Can we think that Jesus Christ will deceive us, or will break His Word, and be faithless to His promises? By no means, says the Holy Ghost: *For God is not as man, that He should lie, nor as the son of man, that he should be changed. Hath He said then, and shall he not do? hath He spoken, and shall He not fulfil?* † Hence it is no less certain that whosoever shall ask of God what is expedient to salvation, and shall proffer his petition in a becoming manner, shall be heard, than it is beyond question that the Word made flesh cannot be false to His promises, or fail to make good that to which He has pledged Himself. Resting on this immovable foundation, St. John Chrysostom plainly asserts, that "it is absolutely impossible for a man who prays in a fitting attitude of mind, and who perseveres in prayer to God, ever to fall into sin."‡ The learned Father Suarez, examining this assertion, and weighing it in the exact balance of theological accuracy, has no hesitation in saying: "If any one pray constantly for perseverance in grace, he will most surely obtain it." This too, though it be a gratuitous gift, which cannot be a matter of strict merit. And he continues, "Hence we assert that a just man, by duly persevering in earnest, frequent prayer, can infallibly obtain final per-

* Si vos, cum sitis mali, nostis bona data dare filiis vestris; quanto magis Pater vester, qui in cœlis est, dabit bona petentibus se? Matth. vij. 11.

† Non est Deus, quasi homo, ut mentiatur, nec ut filius hominis, ut mutetur. Dixit ergo, et non faciet? locutus est, et non implebit? Num. xxiij. 19.

‡ Impossibile est hominem congruo precantem studio, Deoque continue supplicantem, umquam peccare. Homil. Contra concur. ad Theatra, &c.

severance."* Nor should we wonder at this, since it is plain that prayer is the appointed channel by which every spiritual blessing, and consequently, in the end, final perseverance itself, flows to us. Nor can there be any delusion in this, because, as St. Augustine says, "The Eternal Father has assured us of it by His own mouth. *Ask, and you shall receive.* Such is the promise of God; and who shall fear to be deceived, when Truth itself gives us the assurance?"†

240. That wicked apostate and traitorous persecutor of the Church, the Emperor Julian, made proof to his cost of this great power of prayer. During his war with the Persians, he wanted to know how matters stood in the West, so as to shape his plans by intelligence received with a speed beyond the power of man. For this purpose he sent one of the evil spirits with whom in his wickedness he had intimate dealings, with pressing orders to use all haste and to watch and baffle any conspiracies which might be hatching against his imperial dignity. The spirit started on his errand with all expedition, but coming to a place where dwelt a holy solitary, Publius by name, he found himself stopped by the fervent and devout prayers of the hermit, and was wholly unable to proceed further. The demon remained in this place for ten days together, which he wasted in unavailing efforts to surmount the obstacle placed in his way by the prayers of the holy monk. At length, having striven in vain, he returned in confusion to the apostate Emperor, who inquired why he had tarried so long before bringing him the report which he had been so anxious to receive immediately. Hearing that a ragged monk had baffled all his plans by prayer, Julian fell into a towering passion, and vowed that he would be cruelly avenged. But the wretched man was unaware that upon himself the vengeance was to fall; as in this very campaign he was struck by St. Martial with a dart, and

* Dico, si quis oret perseveranter, petendo perseverantiam in gratiâ, infallibiliter eam esse impetraturum. Atque ita dicimus justum, perseverando debito modo in orationis instantiâ, et frequentiâ, posse successive infallibiliter obtinere perseverantiam usque ad mortem. Tom. 3, De Grat., Lib. xij., c. 38, n. 16.

† Petite, et accipietis. Promissa tua sunt. Et quis falli metuat, cum promittit veritas? De Civit. Dei, Lib. xxij., cap. 8.

perished miserably. One of the courtiers who was present at this interview, hearing thus from the demon himself of the marvellous efficacy of prayer, distributed all his wealth in alms to the poor, and went to the wilderness in search of Publius, in order to spend his life in devout prayer: and, under the training of this holy monk, he too became a great servant of God.*

241. But how can we wonder that fervent prayer avails thus to fetter the very demons, and to rob them entirely of all their power and influence, since, as was seen above, it is able to offer an agreeable violence to God Himself, to snatch from His hand the scourge already uplifted for our chastisement, and to force Him to impart grace which our evil deserts have made Him desirous of withholding from us? This He was Himself pleased to show, in a vision to St. Macarius, while this holy man was in prayer with two solitaries.† These had left the world in order to offer themselves to him as companions and followers of his saintly life; but the holy Abbot, seeing them to be, as yet, mere youths, and delicately brought up, did not think that they had strength enough to bear so great a weight. However, not to give offence, he supplied them with tools, that they might build themselves a poor cell in a neighbouring spot; and having furnished some instructions concerning the course of life they were to lead in solitude, he himself returned to his cell. The novices, guiding themselves partly by the rules which the holy Abbot had supplied, partly, too, by the inward direction given by the Holy Spirit, spent three entire years without being seen among men. After which, St. Macarius thought good to go and visit them, to examine into the progress they had made. But before going, he passed an entire week in fasting and prayer, begging from God the light necessary to form a correct judgment of their state. He then went to them, and after a frugal repast taken together, and some short repose, he beheld that, as the two monks began to pray, the roof of the cell opened, and there descended a light that was able to rival the noonday sun; and as the three together began to recite their Psalms, he saw that at each verse said by his companions there

* Ex Lib. Doct. Patrum, Lib. de Sign. et Mirac., n. 9. Baron., ad an. 363.
† Ibid., n. 3.

flashed from the mouth of one a flame, which darted up to heaven quicker than lightning, while from the other there ascended to the skies, swift as a ray of light, what seemed a rope of fire. The holy man knew from this vision how pleasing to God were these two souls, and further learned the violence done to Him by fervent prayer, inasmuch as, like fiery cords, it binds the hands of the Almighty, hindering God from inflicting the strokes of His chastisements, or, like a flaming arrow, pierces His heart, constraining Him to grant whatever we desire and ask for.

242. Hence, if we find ourselves unstable in the observance of the divine law, or slothful and lukewarm in the way of perfection; if we fall frequently into sin, whether mortal or venial; we may attribute the cause to our neglect of asking and beseeching God, and of recommending ourselves to Him in prayer. For were we to pray often for our spiritual needs, and in the way in which God would have us make our supplications, we should most surely obtain all we ask, since God's promise cannot be rendered void. Let us imagine a most compassionate king, who, being moved to pity by the sufferings of the needy found within his dominions, should wish to provide for them all at his own cost, and, with this end in view, should authorise the several rulers and magistrates to supply the poor with clothes, food, and lodging, at the charge of the royal treasury; and let us further suppose, that this intention of the king were made known by a public proclamation in the squares of all the cities in the realm:—if, in such a country one should fall in with a beggar-man, clothed in rags, shivering with cold, faint with hunger, who being asked why he did not avail himself of the liberality of the prince, should reply that he found it too troublesome to ask for relief, what would be said to him? Surely all would remind him that his own laziness was the cause of his starving with hunger and perishing with cold. The very same applies to each one of us. The King of heaven has pledged Himself to supply all we need for the salvation and perfection of our souls; this promise is published to the whole world in the four Holy Gospels. Each one of us is that needy person of whom we have just now spoken, naked as to the Christian virtues, cold in God's service, weak, faint, and liable to fall into

deadly sin, and all because we care not to take the trouble to call, without ceasing, and with our whole hearts, for help from above. To us, then, may it justly be said, that ours is the blame if we advance not in the path of perfection, or (as it may even happen), if we are sliding backwards, and are in imminent danger of a disastrous fall.

243. Ask then incessantly—ask in all your prayers, in all your temptations, in all your perplexities, in all the interior truths of your soul—being always mindful of what St. Augustine says in his comments on the words of the Psalmist: *Blessed be God, Who has not turned away my prayer, nor His loving-kinaness from me:* "Be sure that so long as you slacken not in prayer, God's mercy shall never fail to uphold you with His most mighty help."*

CHAPTER IV.

THE CONDITIONS THAT MUST ACCOMPANY PRAYER IN ORDER THAT IT MAY HAVE THE EFFICACY EXPLAINED ABOVE.

244. I HAVE now shown that prayer cannot fail of its effects, and I have grounded this truth on the infallibility of a faith which rests on the omnipotence and unchangeable truth of that God Who is ever able and ever most willing to make good what He has promised us with his own lips. But the devout reader may here object, that this view of mine is not borne out by his own experience, seeing that more than once, indeed, on very many occasions, he has asked certain favours of God without obtaining them from the divine goodness. I reply, Most true: I have undoubtedly attributed to prayer an infallible efficacy; but then I have always made certain reservations. I have said, that it will obtain everything from God, with a certainty which is none other than the certainty

* *Benedictus Deus, qui non amovit orationem meam, et misericordiam suam a me.* Cum videris non a te amotam deprecationem tuam, securus esto, quia non est a me amota misericordia mea. In Ps. lxv. 20.

of faith; but I have always added, that prayer should be duly and properly made, and in compliance with the conditions which God requires in our supplications. "The reason why you have not been heard when you pray," says St. James, "is that you have not learnt how to pray." *You ask and you obtain not, because you ask amiss;** that is, you have failed in some one of the necessary conditions. These conditions must now be mentioned. Let me claim your attention, as I am going to place in your hands the key with which you may open at pleasure the exhaustless store of the divine goodness, and enrich yourselves with gifts suitable to your every want.

245. St. Thomas Aquinas lays down four conditions necessary in order that our prayers may be efficacious. First, that we pray for our own wants. Secondly, that we ask for things necessary to our salvation. Thirdly, that we ask in faith. Fourthly, that we pray with perseverance.† The holy Doctor had already mentioned another condition as necessary for the obtaining the favours we desire; this is humility in prayer.‡ Thus we may say, that the conditions indispensably requisite in prayer in order that it may prevail at the throne of God, can be reduced to five: we must pray for ourselves, we must pray for things conducive to our salvation, we must pray with faith, humility, and perseverance. We have already sufficiently explained the first and second of these conditions in a former Chapter, and have shown in what sense they are to be understood. It remains now to treat of the three others, which are the most important, as it is usually owing to our failing in them that our prayer is of no avail. We will therefore speak of the faith, humility, and perseverance with which we should pray, if we truly desire to be heard.

246. The Angelic Doctor, whom we have just quoted, tells us, that the power of prayer to obtain what we ask, has its root in

* Petitis, et non accipitis, eo quod male petatis. Jac. iv. 4.

† Ideo ponuntur quatuor conditiones, quibus concurrentibus semper aliquis impetrat quod petit: ut scilicet pro se petat, necessaria ad salutem, pie, et perseveranter. 2, 2, qu. 83, art. 15 ad 2.

‡ Fides est necessaria ex parte Dei, quem oramus, ut scilicet credamus, ab eo nos posse obtinere quod petimus; humilitas autem est necessaria ex parte ipsius petentis, qui suam indigentiam recognoscit. Eod. art., in corp.

the faith of him who prays, while its merit depends mainly on charity ; * for Christ has promised to grant us the graces we beg of Him, on condition, however, that we ask with faith. Thus, in St. Matthew, He says, *All things whatsoever you shall ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive.*† And in St. Mark, *All things whatsoever you ask when you pray, believe that you shall receive ; and they shall come unto you.*‡ And again, in the same Gospel, Christ says, *All things are possible to him that believes.* § Even, as He adds further on, *If a man shall say to this mountain, Be thou removed, and be cast into the sea, and shall not stagger in his heart, but believe that whatsoever he saith shall be done, it shall be done unto him.* St. James, trained in the school of Christ, sets forth his Master's teaching in words still more forcible ; *If any one want wisdom . . . let him ask in faith, nothing wavering ;* as if to say, undoubtingly, without fear lest he should fail to obtain what he asks for ; *for he that wavereth like a wave of the sea which is moved and carried about by the wind, let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord.*‖ Could anything be put more clearly?

247. But in order not to go astray in a matter of such moment, it is necessary to determine what is this faith—or, to speak more accurately, this confidence—failing which God declares that He will withhold His gifts from us. I will state briefly, that it is a virtue which resides partly in the understanding. and partly in the will. In the understanding, inasmuch as the suppliant believes most firmly that God, impelled thereto by His sovereign goodness, and bound as He is by His oft-repeated promises, will assuredly

* Dicendum, quod oratio innititur principaliter fidei, non quantum ad efficaciam merendi, quia sic innititur principaliter caritati ; sed quantum ad efficaciam impetrandi. Q. 83, art. 15, ad 3.

† Omnia quæcumque petieritis in oratione credentes, accipietis. Matth. xxj. 22.

‡ Quæcumque orantes petitis, credite quia accipietis, et evenient vobis. Marc. xj. 24.

§ Omnia possibilia sunt credenti. Marc. ix. 22.

‖ Postulet autem in fide nihil hæsitans : qui enim hæsitat, similis est fluctui maris, qui a vento movetur, et circumfertur. Non ergo æstimet homo ille, quod accipiat aliquid a Domino. Jac. i. 6.

grant the graces for which we ask. In the will, because, adhering to a belief so solidly grounded, this power undoubtingly and unhesitatingly trusts, as St. James requires, that these favours will be obtained; and encouraged and animated by such hope, prays with fervour of spirit, with great earnestness, and with a sort of holy importunity. The firmer this hope, grounded on the faith described above, the greater certainty the suppliant has that his petition will be favourably accepted at the throne of mercy and grace. Thus St. Bernard, in his comments on the passage in Deuteronomy, *Every place that your foot shall tread upon shall be yours*,* writes: "The feet of our soul are our hopes, and we shall be so much the surer to attain what we seek for, as we shall allow our desires to expand; yet so that our hopes, by means of faith, be firmly rooted in nothing but the goodness and unfailing truthfulness of God."† St. Mechtildis was taught the same doctrine, from above, in the following words: "In the degree," said our Lord to her, "that each one shall believe in Me, and rely upon My goodness, shall he obtain what he asks for; yea, and immeasurably more. For it cannot be that I should withhold what is besought of Me in holy faith and implicit confidence."‡ A faith, that is, in the sovereign goodness and inviolable promises of God. Hence, as St. Augustine says, "If confidence fail, prayer disappears; it is without soul, vigour, force, efficacy: it languishes, it dies."§

248. The same holy Doctor has left on record a wondrous instance of the power of prayer when made with a lively trust in God.‖ There lived in Carthage a certain man, Innocent by name, at whose house the Saint used to lodge, and to whom he was much attached. This poor man was confined to his bed by a very painful illness; and unable to endure any longer what was

* Omnis locus, quem calcaverit pes vester, vester, erit. Deuter. xj. 24.

† Pes vester utique spes vestra est, quantumque illa processerit, obtinebit; si tamen in Deo tota figatur, ut firma sit, et non titubet.

‡ Quantum quis mihi credere, et de bonitate meâ præsumere potest, tantum, et in infinitum amplius obtinebit. Quia impossibile est hominem non percipere, quod sancte credidit, et speravit. Blos., Monil. Spirit., cap. 11, s. 6.

§ Si fides deficit, oratio perit Serm. 36.

‖ De Civit. Dei, lib. xxij. cap. 8.

little less than a constant martyrdom, he underwent an operation; but with little benefit; for one seat of the disease escaped the operator's eye and knife. For which reason, hardly had the wounds made by the surgeon healed, than the invalid had to face the same tortures a second time. So that when the physicians announced one day that another operation would be necessary, the sick man, as the holy Doctor relates, trembled, grew deadly pale and wept bitterly.* He begged the holy Bishop Aurelius, who had come with some of his Clergy and with St. Augustine himself, on a visit to him, to return on the morrow, to assist at his death rather than at his sufferings, for he was quite convinced that he would die under the surgeons' hands. They all showed much sympathy with the sufferer in this terrible trial, and exhorted him to patience and conformity to the will of God; then kneeling down, they began to pray for him. St. Augustine observes, that the sainted Bishop "prostrated himself in prayer with so lively a faith, accompanied by so many tears, that whether the others joined in prayer I knew not. For my part I was wholly unable to pray. I could but inwardly repeat these words, 'Lord, whose prayers wilt Thou hear, if Thou hearken not to his?'"† The surgeons came on the following day, and having made all things ready, they went to the patient, and having undone his bandages, examined the diseased part, when, to their unspeakable wonder, they found it entirely healed. At so unmistakable a miracle, all of them broke out into exclamations of joy and gladness, and gave to God the whole glory of the cure: St. Augustine especially, who beheld in it a confirmation of what he had said in his heart the day before, namely, that prayers such as those of Bishop Aurelius must needs be answered. If, then, any one desire to obtain some favour from God, let him beseech in all confidence. While presenting his petitions to the Almighty, let him bear in mind that sovereign goodness which urges God to be favourable to us; those oft-repeated, unfailing

* Expavit, et expalluit nimio timore correptus. Ibid.

† Utrum orarent alii, et in hoc eorum verteretur intentio, nesciebam. Ego prorsus orare non poteram. Hoc tantummodo breviter in corde meo dixi: Domine, quas tuorum preces audis, si has non exaudis? Ibid.

promises which He has made to us. This will help to excite an unwavering trust, which will preclude any doubt that might be suggested by faint-heartedness; and in this hope, let him ask, and unwaveringly persevere in asking, for what he shall most assuredly obtain by so doing

249. The next condition required, in order that our prayers may avail with God, is humility. He that prays must have one eye fixed on himself and on his own miseries, that the sight may humble him and fill him with confusion, by bringing home to him his unworthiness to receive any favour; the other eye must rest upon God's mercy, His liberality and His promises, so as to make the heart expand with a lively hope of receiving every good and perfect gift. Humility and confidence are the two wings on which prayer soars aloft to God; the two arms which force His hands to shed every blessing. Thus did the Prophet Daniel pray: *Incline, O my God, Thy ear, and hearken; open Thine eyes, and behold our desolation, and the city upon which Thy name is called: for it is not for our righteous deeds that we present our prayers before Thy face, but for the multitude of Thy tender mercies.** Here we have self-diffidence, along with trust in God, whereby the Lord was moved speedily to hear the prophet and to send the Archangel Gabriel to show him what was to come to pass.†

250. True it is, as St. Thomas says, that prayer is grounded principally upon confidence; but such confidence, in order to be pleasing in God's sight, must be accompanied by sincere humility, without which it cannot avail to touch the heart of God, Who says by Isaias: *To whom shall I have respect but to him that is poor and little, and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at My word.* ‡

* Inclina Deus meus aurem tuam, et audi: aperi oculos tuos, et vide desolationem nostram, et civitatem supra quam invocatum est nomen tuum: neque enim in justificationibus nostris prosternimus preces ante faciem tuam, sed in miserationibus tuis multis. Dan. ix. 18.

† Adhuc me loquente in oratione, ecce vir Gabriel, quem videram in visione a principio, cito volans, tetigit me in tempore sacrificii vespertini. Et docuit me, et locutus est mihi. Ibid. ix. 21, 22.

‡ Ad quem respiciam, nisi ad pauperculum, et contritum spiritu, et trementem sermones meos? Isai. lxvj. 2.

That the ocean may cover the shore with its waves, the shore needs but to be lowered; and just so, the soul needs but to humble itself before God in lowly self-knowledge, for the Almighty to hasten and fill it to overflowing with the fulness of His gifts. Call to mind the prayer of the Pharisee and the Publican. The former prayed with a heart puffed up with pride, relying on the merits of his fasts and offerings: the latter, in all lowliness of spirit, acknowledging himself a sinner, striking his breast, and not daring so much as lift up his eyes to heaven. We need not to be told what was the result of these two prayers, made with such opposite dispositions. The prayer of the one was rejected, that of the other accepted. The proud Pharisee met with his condemnation; the lowly Publican obtained, by his humility, forgiveness and justification. Hence I will conclude with St. Bernard: "Let our prayers for life everlasting be made in all humility and perfect distrust of our own merits, and with that complete confidence, which becomes us, in the mercy alone of God."*

251. A third condition which our prayers must have, in order to move effectually the heart of God, is, perseverance in asking. So important is it, that St. Hilary makes all the efficacy of prayer to consist solely in this. "The only secret for obtaining favour from God," says the Saint, "is to persevere in prayer."† For although God has promised to grant us the favours we seek at His hands, provided they help us to attain to our last end, eternal life, He has not promised to grant them immediately, nor even soon. To some, He grants what is asked at the outset; but others are kept praying and waiting for weeks and months, nay, for years together. Some obtain whatever they ask for without any delay; others only insensibly and by slow degrees. All this happens through the hidden and unsearchable counsels of the providence of God, which we cannot pretend to fathom. Suffice it for us to know, that in this diversity of conduct God has no other end but our greater advantage, and His own greater

* Sit oratio, quæ fit pro æterna vitâ, in omni humilitate, præsumens de solâ, ut dignum est, miseratione divinâ. Serm. 5 in Quadrag.

† Obtinere in solâ precum morâ est. Can. 6. in Matth.

glory. Certain is it, however, that if we continue to pray, we shall, sooner or later, obtain all that is not prejudicial to our final happiness; for the promise of God can in nowise fail.

252. Hence St. Gregory the Great has well said: "If you are not heard the first time you make your petition, do not cease praying, but rather be earnest in supplication and in lifting up your voice to God. For the Lord wishes to be entreated; to have violence done to Him; to be conquered ever by a kind of holy importunity."* St. Jerome alleges, in support of this teaching, the example of that blind man who sat on the roadside on the way to Jericho, and who cried aloud to Jesus for mercy. He was told not to cry so loud, and to hold his peace; but he only cried the louder, *Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me.*† "This," says the holy Doctor, "should be the conduct of every one who desires by prayer to obtain of God what he stands in need of; he should on no account cease from praying, nor hold his peace, but rather, the less his supplications seem to avail, the more should he persist therein, and the more should he cry to God in all the earnestness of his heart."‡

253. But St. John Chrysostom is still more emphatic in urging us to this perseverance in prayer and supplication. He sets before us the paralytic man in the Gospel, who had lain for thirty-eight years by the pool of Bethesda, trembling on its brink even as the reed trembles on the river bank. Then, all on fire with a holy zeal, the Saint exclaims: "Shame upon us! shame upon us, dearly beloved! let us mourn over our incredible sloth. For eight-and-thirty years did this man stricken with paralysis wait by the side of the pool, anxiously expecting the moment

* Habes in hoc perseverantiæ documentum, ut si prima non exaudiris, ab oratione non deficias: imo precibus, et clamori insistas. Vult Deus rogari, vult cogi, vult quâdam importunitate vinci. In Psalm. Pœnit., vj. 1.

† Miserere mei, fili David. Marc. x. 47.

‡ Qui ad cupita pervenire voluerit, reflectere mentem a studio orationis non debet, sed magis perseverare in intentione cœptâ illum oportet. Hinc in evangelio cœcus ille, qui in Jericho transeuntem Jesum audierat, misereri sibi ab eo petebat; sed cum a prætereuntibus sibi juberetur ut taceret, ipse multo magis clamabat, dicens: *Miserere mei, fili David.* In Lament. Jer., cap. 3.

when he should be healed, and disappointed of his hope (not indeed through his own neglect, but because others got in before him): he did not, for all that, lose heart, nor was he wearied of waiting, nor did he for one moment despair of gaining his wish. Yet we, if we persevere for ten days in prayer, and do not see that we are heard, straightway grow slack at our prayer, are discouraged, and abandon it altogether."* In order, then, not to fall into this fault of inconstancy, so prejudicial to the efficacy of prayer, causing it more frequently than not to remain without result, let us call to mind these three points, and reason within ourselves. This grace which I am now asking of God, is, as I believe, expedient to my salvation; hence, God cannot refuse to grant it. Heaven and earth may change, not so the promises made by God Almighty.† I am determined, therefore, to persist with the utmost constancy in praying for it, without ever allowing myself to be disheartened: for by such perseverance in asking I am sure eventually to obtain it, either sooner or later; either all at once, or shortly, and by degrees: *God is faithful*, says the Apostle, *and cannot contradict Himself*.‡

254. It would be impossible almost to find a more noble example of faith, humility and perseverance in prayer, than that given us by the woman of Canaan.§ She presented herself before our Blessed Lord, and begged Him to have compassion upon one of her daughters who was cruelly tormented by the devil. But Jesus turned away His face, and did not even condescend to make answer. She was not dispirited at meeting with so unpromising a reception; but, lifting up her voice, she began to importune our dear Lord with cries so loud, that the Apostles entreated their divine Master to send away the woman, for she

* Pudeat nos, pudeat, dilectissimi, et incredibilem socordiam nostram deploremus. Octo et triginta anno paralyticus ad piscinam expectaverat, expectabatque, neque ejus impletum est desiderium: neque negligentiâ suâ non sanabatur, sed præventus ab aliis: neque propterea desperavit. Nos autem si vel decem dies orationibus invigilantes, non exaudimur, jam tepescimus. Hom. 35 in cap. v. Joan.

† Cœlum et terra transibunt; verba autem mea non præteribunt. Matth. xxiv. 35.

‡ Fidelis permanet; non potest negare se ipsum. 2 Tim. ij. 13.

§ Matth. xv. 22.

was annoying them with her clamours.* Jesus answered them: *I was not sent to any but to the sheep that are lost of the house of Israel.* The Canaanitish woman, hearing that she was excluded from the number of those whom Christ had come to benefit, did not lose heart; but confiding more than ever in His goodness, she ran and threw herself at His feet, imploring help. Our Blessed Lord made no sign of being touched by this act of reverence and homage, and said: *It is not good to take the bread of the children, and to cast it to the dogs.* And yet, in spite of this very severe answer, the woman was not put out, but immediately replied: *Yea, Lord, for the whelps also eat of the crumbs that fall from the table of their master.* Then Jesus made her this answer: *O woman, great is thy faith: be it done unto thee according as thou wilt.*† Great was the faith with which this woman prayed, since so many rebuffs failed to make her lose confidence. Great, too, was her humility; for though treated as an unclean animal, she not only did not show resentment, but acknowledging herself for one, she sought, on this very account, to be favourably heard by the Redeemer. Great was her perseverance; for despite the opposition of the Apostles, who would have driven her away, despite the repeated rebuffs she received from Christ, she ceased not from praying. Let us then copy her faith, her humility and her perseverance, when we pray to God. If, in order to try our constancy, Christ seems to turn a deaf ear to us, as He did to this Canaanean woman, let us lift up our voices, and pray the more earnestly; let us fall prostrate in His sight with the more fervour, in fullest assurance that although He may delay granting us what we ask for in such wise, never can He refuse it to us altogether.

* Rogabant eum, dicentes: Dimitte eam, quia clamat post nos. Matth. xv. 23.
† O mulier, magna est fides tua: fiat tibi sicut vis. Ibid. 28.

CHAPTER V.

ON VOCAL PRAYER. HOW FAR IT IS OF OBLIGATION. IN WHAT MANNER IT SHOULD BE MADE IN ORDER THAT IT MAY BEAR FRUIT.

255. We have hitherto been considering prayer in so far as it is the silent supplication of our hearts; we have now to treat of it inasmuch as it finds expression in speech, and is called Vocal Prayer. In order to determine whether this be obligatory, we must distinguish between two kinds of Vocal Prayer, one of which is called public, and the other private, prayer. Public, or common prayer, is that which is offered to God by the ministers of Holy Church, who in their own persons, represent the whole Christian community. We may exemplify this by the instance of the prayers said by the priest during the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. "Such prayers," says St. Thomas, "must needs be vocal, in order to be heard by the people for whom they are offered."* Indeed, adds the holy Doctor, it is the intention of the Church that these prayers be said aloud, in order to be heard by all and understood by all, since they are common to all. Private prayer is offered by the individual, whether for himself or for others for whom he is moved to pray by an impulse of special affection, and the Saint is of opinion that it need not be vocal, but it suffices that it be made to God by the mind.†

256. Other Theologians, however, are of opinion, that we are obliged to Vocal Prayer, both because such has been the custom of Holy Church from the beginning, and on account of the example set us by Christ Himself, Who often prayed vocally; and further, because all the Saints have used it: lastly, because our Lord, when asked by His apostles to teach them how to pray, made answer: *When you pray, say; Father, hallowed be Thy*

* Et ideo oportet, quod talis oratio innotescat toti populo, pro quo profertur; quod non posset fieri, nisi esset vocalis. 2, 2, qu. 65, a. 12, in corp.

† Oratio vero singularis est quæ offertur a singulari personâ cujuscumque, sive pro se, sive pro aliis, orantis: et de hujusmodi orationis necessitate non est quod sit vocalis. Ibid.

name, &c.* St. Augustine seems to be of this mind; for, in his explanation of those words of the Beloved Disciple, *Jesus, lifting up His eyes to Heaven, said: Father, the hour is come, glorify Thy Son, that Thy Son may glorify Thee*,† he discourses as follows: "Our Lord, the only begotten of the Father and co-eternal with Him, might, in the form of a servant, and as being subject, have prayed in silence if there had been need; but when He drew near to His Father as a suppliant, He remembered ever that He was our Master and Teacher. Hence He would also make known to us the prayer which He offered on our behalf: so that not only the lessons of so great a Master, but His very prayer to His Father might serve for the edification of His disciples."‡

257. But whichever opinion we may prefer to adopt, certain it is, that vocal prayer is most useful, and should not be neglected by any true Christian, for the three following reasons, which are mentioned by the Angelic Doctor.§ First, then, it stirs up the inward devotion of our heart, and is a great help to the mind to raise itself to God. As long as our soul remains united to the body, it must depend on the bodily senses in its spiritual operations; and hence, as St. Augustine teaches, the soul finds a great assistance in words and gestures for enkindling within itself holy desires and affections.‖ Nay, the same Saint tells us of himself, that at the beginning of his conversion he was moved to shed tears in abundance by the hymns, chants, and devout prayers of the Divine Office. Secondly, it is most fitting that we should worship God not only with the inward powers of the soul (the intellect and the will), but with

* Doce nos orare. Cum oratis dicite: Pater noster, qui es in cœlis, &c. Luc. xj. 2.

† Sublatis Jesus oculis in cœlum dixit: Pater, venit hora, clarifica filium tuum. Jo. xvij. 1.

‡ Poterat dominus noster, Unigenitus, et coæternus Patris, in formâ servi et ex formâ servi (si hoc opus esset), orare silentio: sed ita Patri se exhibere voluit precatorem, ut meminisset se esse nostrum doctorem. Proinde eam quam fecit orationem pro nobis, notam fecit et nobis: quoniam tanti magistri non solum ad ipsos sermocinatio, sed etiam pro ipsis ad Patrem oratio, discipulorum esset ædificatio. Tract. 104, in xvij. Joan.

§ Ut supra.

‖ Verbis rogamus Deum, ut illis rerum signis nos ipsos admoneamus . . . et ad augendum desiderium sanctum nosmetipsos acrius excitemus. Epist. 121., Ad Probam. cap. 9.

those of the body, and consequently, also, with the tongue; as both the senses of our body and the faculties of our soul are gifts received from His bounteous hand. Wherefore the Prophet Osee says that we ought to offer to God the sacrifice of our lips; which can mean nothing but vocal prayer.* Thirdly, vocal prayer gives a kind of vent to the devout affections which inflame our hearts, and thus the ardours of divine charity are increased by this breathing forth of our heart's love. Hence the Royal Prophet, after singing in his fifteenth Psalm, *Therefore my heart hath been glad*, quickly adds, *and my tongue hath rejoiced*, that is, broke forth in cries of joy.†

258. There is no need, however, of proving at length the necessity and advantages of vocal prayer; for scarcely any Christian neglects it who takes the slightest heed of his eternal welfare, or fails to repeat several times each day that most beautiful of all vocal prayers, taught us by Divine Wisdom itself, I mean the Lord's Prayer. But what we must especially bear in mind is, that such prayers are not to be said merely with the tongue, as is done by a large majority of the faithful, but should be accompanied with attention of mind and affection of heart; otherwise they will be displeasing to God, and of no advantage to him that recites them. This the Apostle Paul plainly tells us: *If I pray with the tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is without fruit:* that is, without any merit, and unworthy to obtain anything from the divine bounty.‡ Nay rather, on prayers such as these must fall the rebuke which the Lord addressed by the mouth of Isaias to the children of Israel on account of their inattention and distractions in prayer: *This people with their lips glorify Me, but their heart is far from Me.*§ If then we would have our prayers of much avail, of great merit, and very pleasing to God, besides praying with the tongue, we must be careful to pray with the mind, with the spirit, and with the heart, as St. Paul warns

* Omnem aufer iniquitatem, et accipe bonum, et reddemus vitulum labiorum nostrorum. Osee xiv. 3.

† Lætatum est cor meum, et exultavit lingua mea. Ps. xv. 9.

‡ Si orem linguâ . . . mens autem mea sine fructu est. 1 Cor. xiv. 14.

§ Populus hic labiis me honorat: cor autem eorum longe est a me. Isai. xxix. 13.

us.* Hence, in beginning the Divine Office, the Rosary, the Our Father, the Hail Mary, or other vocal prayers, we should place ourselves in the presence of God; and while our lips and tongue are moving, our heart also should speak to God, as was the case when Anna, the wife of Elcanah, prayed in the temple.† In brief, I would wish that the following words of St. Gregory were deeply engraven on the hearts of my readers, so aptly do they express the necessity of this attention in vocal prayer in order that it may be fruitful and of use. "True prayer," says this great Doctor of Holy Church, "consists, not in the words shaped by the mouth, but in the interior attention of the heart; for the sounds which sink into the ears of God are not the words which fall from our lips, but the holy desires and aspirations of our hearts. If, when begging of our Lord life everlasting, our lips alone move and our heart is void of desire, though we may cry out with a loud voice we shall be as though silent, and saying much shall remain in the sight of God as though mute and dumb."‡

259. Father Martin del Rio relates,§ that St. Robert the Abbot beheld, while his monks were at prayer in Choir, the devil entering among them in the guise of a labouring man, with a huge pitchfork in his hands, and a basket hanging upon his shoulder. He at once began to make the round of the stalls, and with neck stretched out, and eyes all intent, to take note of the faults each one committed in praying and singing the Office. If he found any one asleep, he burst out into loud laughter and mocked him, jeering rudely. When he came across one whose distractions were voluntary, he made every demonstration of joy. At length he met with a novice whose mind was taken up with evil thoughts, and who was even then planning his escape from the monastery. Overwhelmed with glee,

* Orabo spiritu, orabo et mente; psallam spiritu, psallam et mente. 1 Cor. xiv. 15.

† Anna loquebatur in corde suo ad Dominum, tantumque labia illius movebantur, et vox penitus non audiebatur. 1 Reg. i. 13.

‡ Vera quippe postulatio, non in oris est vocibus sed in cogitationibus cordis. Valentiores namque voces apud secretissimas aures Dei non faciunt verba nostra, sed desideria. Æternam enim vitam si ore petimus, nec tamen corde desideramus, clamantes tacemus. Moral., Lib. xxij. c. 12.

§ Disquis. Magic., tom. i., lib. ij., quæst. 38, sect. 3.

the demon took him up with his pitchfork, flung him into his basket, and, joyful beyond measure at the capture, fled in haste. And indeed the wretched man left the cloister that very night, then, after an infamous life, met with a miserable death. We may hence learn that psalmody and other prayer, made distractedly and in a sleepy manner, pleases the devil rather than Almighty God; and, that instead of earning for us crowns in paradise, it heaps up fuel to feed the fire of purgatory, or even at times the unquenchable flames of hell; as was the case with this unhappy novice. St. Cyprian is therefore quite right in exclaiming, "What sloth and strange neglect to be distracted while praying to the Lord, and to allow ourselves to be led away by profane and idle thoughts and fancies! as if any thoughts were more important than to consider that in time of prayer we are speaking to God. This is not to guard ourselves from the devil who tempts us, but rather to give him pleasure. This is to offend the Divine Majesty at the very time we are seeking to propitiate the Almighty by our supplications."* Let us then be careful lest our vocal prayers fail in the attention which is their very life, without which they are as a soulless corpse; for, even as a dead body is an object of horror to our eyes, so too, prayers said without attention are not true prayers at all, but in the sight of God are the mere dead body of prayer.

CHAPTER VI.

THREE SORTS OF ATTENTION SUITABLE IN PRAYER.

260. St. Thomas says that the attention which we may have in our vocal prayers is threefold.† The first kind is that which we

* Quæ autem segnitia est, alienari, et capi ineptis cogitationibus et profanis, cùm Dominum precaris; quasi sit aliud, quod debeas magis cogitare, quam quod cum Deo loquaris? . . . Hoc est ab hoste in tutum non cavere: hoc est, quando oras Dominum, majestatem Dei negligentiâ orationis offendere. De Orat. Dom.

† Dicendum, quod triplex est attentio, quæ orationi vocali potest adhiberi:

pay to the words, as in the recitation of the Divine Office, during which we are bound to read the words carefully, and to pronounce them distinctly, so as to avoid making mistakes in the exact pronunciation of the prescribed words. But that this attention may be of real advantage, the person must have begun by placing himself in God's presence with the purpose to pray by the recital of this particular form of prayer. The second kind of attention is that paid to the meaning of the words uttered, as when those reciting the Psalms, the Our Father, Hail Mary, or other like prayers, all of which abound with devout affections, reflect meanwhile on the sense of what they say, and unite to the verbal recitation the devout feelings of their hearts. If the person making use of such prayer, instead of going always forward—as is done when reciting the Canonical Hours—prefer to stop at every verse and make devout reflections, nourishing his mind with the various meanings which occur; then the prayer will be something more than merely vocal; it will be mingled with Mental Prayer, and may be styled (to use the expression of St. Ignatius in his Spiritual Exercises) the "Second Method" of prayer. The third kind of attention is that given not to the words merely, nor to their import only, but to God Himself, to Whom all prayer is addressed directly or indirectly, as when, in prayer, we keep ourselves recollected in the presence of God, and adore, love, and thank Him, or entreat Him in our hearts to grant us the graces of which He sees us to stand in need. The first sort of attention suffices; the second is good, and may be very profitable; the third is the best, and may become most advantageous to such as earnestly apply to it. And we may here observe, that St. Thomas calls this last-mentioned application of the mind most necessary, especially to such as by their ignorance of the Latin language are unable to enter into the sense of the Psalms, the Pater Noster, or other prayers approved by Holy Church;* for thus, while with their tongues they recite words which they

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una quidem, quâ attenditur ad verba, ne aliquis in eis erret. Secunda, quâ attenditur ad sensum verborum. Tertia quâ attenditur ad finem orationis, scilicet ad Deum, et ad rem pro quâ oratur. 2, 2 quæst. 83, art. 3. in corp.

* Quæ quidem est maxime necessaria: et hanc etiam possunt habere idiotæ. Ibid.

understand not, instead of allowing their thoughts to wander in every direction, they can and should fix their minds on God, and occupy themselves with devout and profitable affections.

261. There is a well-known instance of this in the Chronicles of the Cistercian Choir. St. Bernard, while at choir one night with his monks, had the following vision: He beheld, by the side of each of the religious, an Angel with pen and paper in hand, taking down every psalm, verse, and word that was recited. There was this difference, nevertheless, that some Angels wrote in letters of gold, others of silver; others again used ink, others dipped their pens in water; while some stood holding their pens in their hands, without taking down anything. While the Saint was beholding this spectacle with the eyes of his body, God Almighty opened those of his mind, and, by a ray of heavenly light, caused him to seize the true meaning of this vision. He now understood that the letters of gold signified fervour of spirit, the inward charity that animated the prayers of some; those of silver denoted devotion, sincere in itself, but joined with a less degree of fervour. The letters in ink indicated the scrupulous exactness wherewith some recited the words of the psalms, but with very little devotional feeling. The prayers written with water indicated the negligence of such as, overcome with drowsiness, indolence, or idle thoughts, did not give careful attention to what they were reciting with their tongue. The Angels who wrote nothing represented the indolence and malice of those who were asleep or voluntarily distracted. We may gather from this legend that our Guardian Angels will write down our vocal prayers in divers characters, according to the measure of the attention, fervour, and devotion, with which we pronounce the words.

262. But the reader may wish to know who takes note of the prayers which the Angels do not register, and whether they are wholly forgotten, and left both unrewarded and unpunished. I may direct them for an answer to another vision, from which it appears that such prayers are written by the demons in dark characters, indicative of the severe punishment in store.* A holy Priest, after having celebrated Mass for the people, beheld

* Joan. Junior. In lib. Scala Cœli.

standing by the altar, a demon, who, with pen and large skin of parchment in hand, was busily writing. The servant of God, without feeling any fear, commanded him, in the name of Jesus Christ, to show what he was so carefully noting down. The fiend replied, "I am taking note of all the sins committed by the people while assisting at Mass." Upon this the Priest, with a courage befitting his calling, snatched the long scroll from the enemy's hands, and read out before all the people the list of the faults each one had committed that morning at Mass. On hearing themselves thus publicly convicted of all the acts of immodesty and irreverence of which they had been guilty in Church, in time of prayer and during the Holy Sacrifice, they conceived a great sorrow, and hastened to confess with sincere contrition. When the Confessions were concluded, all trace of the infernal handwriting had vanished from the parchment; a sure token of the pardon God had granted. We shall then do well, when we begin to say our beads, the Office, or other pious prayers, to figure to ourselves our Guardian Angel standing on one side ready to note down our prayer in the Book of Life, if it be worthy of reward; and on the other side, the devil ready to mark it in the Book of Death, if it deserve punishment. And that we may gain merit and not incur chastisements from our prayers, I will say with St. Cyprian: "When we are at prayer, dearly beloved, let us be watchful and apply ourselves with all the earnestness of our hearts. Far from us, at that time, be every worldly and carnal thought. The mind should then be intent upon nothing save upon the matter of our prayer alone."* The same holy martyr proceeds to inculcate such attention by the words of the Priest, who, at the Preface of the Mass, says to the people, "Lift up your hearts:" to which all used to reply, "We have them lifted up to the Lord." Whereby we are reminded that in time of prayer, our thoughts must be wholly fixed on God alone.†

* Quando stamus ad orationem, fratres dilectissimi, vigilare, et incumbere ad preces toto corde debemus. Cogitatio omnis sæcularis, et carnalis abscedat, nec quidquam tunc animus quam id solum cogitet, quod precatur. De Oration. Dom., Serm. 6.

† Ideo et sacerdos ante orationem, præfatione præmissâ, parat fratrum

263. It must be borne in mind, however, that what has hitherto been said applies only to wilful distractions either purposely sought for the sake of amusement, or admitted with advertence; whether these proceed from the inconstancy of our fancy, or from the suggestions of the enemy of all good. Distractions such as these are alone sinful, St. Thomas teaches, and alone deprive our prayer of all fruit.* But in no sense do I allude to those involuntary wanderings which may happen to any pious person quite against his will, when, in placing himself before God in order to implore help with all earnestness, he finds himself transported elsewhere by importunate imaginings; provided these be driven away directly, and the sense of God's presence be renewed. Such distractions, as we learn from the same holy Doctor, though they return a hundred times, are by no means incompatible with true prayer.† Nay, he further adds, for the encouragement of certain timorous consciences, that even persons raised to the highest pitch of contemplation, are, at times, borne down by human frailty to thoughts of earth, by the involuntary wanderings of the mind.‡ Those, then, who are in earnest about their spiritual progress, must in time of vocal prayer keep strict guard over their minds and hearts, and they must take heed not deliberately to admit any thought foreign to prayer. When they do this, they need be under no alarm that their petitions will be advantageous to themselves and very pleasing to God.

mentes, dicendo: Sursum corda; ut dum respondet plebs: Habemus ad Dominum, admoneantur, nihil aliud se, quam Dominum cogitare debere. Ibid.

* Si quis ex proposito in oratione mente vagatur, hoc peccatum est, et impedit orationis fructum. Art. Suprac. ad. 3.

† Dicendum, quod in spiritu, et in veritate orat, qui ex instinctu spiritus ad orandum accedit; etiamsi ex aliquâ infirmitate mens postmodum evagetur. Eod. art., ad 1.

‡ Mens humana, propter infirmitatem naturæ, diu stare in alto non potest. Pondere enim infirmitatis humanæ deprimitur anima ad inferiora. Ed ideo contingit, quod cum mens orantis ascendit in Deum per contemplationem, subito evagatur ex quâdam infirmitate. Eod. art., ad. 2.

CHAPTER VII.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS TO DIRECTORS ON THE SUBJECT OF VOCAL PRAYER.

264. First suggestion. From what has been stated in the foregoing Chapters, a Director will have perceived that the first remedy to be prescribed to penitents against every spiritual ailment—the chief means for acquiring every virtue and spiritual gift—is the prayer of petition and the having recourse to God. As we have heretofore shown, the avoidance of evil, and the attainment of every kind of supernatural good, are, of necessity, the effects of divine grace; and according to the ordinary laws of God's providence, in the present dispensation, these necessary gifts are vouchsafed only to those who ask for them. If, then, the penitent be frail and weak of purpose, and hence frequently fall into the same disorders, he should be told to recommend himself to God in prayer. If he be assailed by temptation, or hurried away by the violence of his appetites, he must be ordered to beg help of God, at the first outburst of passion or the first motion of evil suggestion. If he be backward in the exercise of any virtue, he should be exhorted to ask God for strength. If he be in distress, persecuted, perplexed, or in doubt, the Director must bid him have recourse to prayer—to be diligent in vocal and mental prayer, in time of Holy Communion, in the morning and the evening; in a word, at all times. This is the chief and surest means of spiritual progress, for, as was seen above, constant prayer must obtain its effect sooner or later.

265. Second suggestion. The Director will meet with certain pusillanimous people, who, after having recommended their case to God for a certain length of time, whether it be with the object of ridding themselves of some vice, or of acquiring some virtue, eventually lose heart and say to themselves, and at times to others also, that God does not hear them, that the Saints will not listen to them; and as they fear lest by such sentiments they

may be disparaging God's goodness, they add, that they mean not by such language to charge the goodness of God with being unwilling to do them favours, but they will have it that their sins and their wickedness render them unworthy to be heard. And the worst of it is, that they believe such vile faint-heartedness to be true humility. The Director must open the eyes of these blind persons, and show them that this depression of spirit is not humility, but its poisonous counterfeit, which the devil puts into their minds in order to disgust them with prayer, or at all events to render their prayers ineffectual with God. True humility, which comes from above, has this property, that the more it lowers us in our own estimation by the knowledge it gives us of our own misery, the more does it raise us to confidence in God by the knowledge it brings us of His goodness and promises. Thus, any feeling that contracts our hearts and diminishes hope, is not humility, but pusillanimity and diffidence, which rob prayer of its power and leave it without fruit. Let the Director, therefore, see to it, that these persons realise this truth; then he may fix them immovably in faith, reminding them of the teaching of St. Thomas, alleged above: namely, that the Almighty sheds abroad His graces on account of His goodness, mercy and promises, not in view of our merits; and that when we fail not in a firm and steady trust in God, our very sins cannot be an obstacle to the attainment of His benefits. "Hope alone," says St. Bernard, "can avail to obtain Thy mercy, O my God; nor dost Thou pour the balm of Thy loving-kindness into any other vessel but one of trust; that is to say, into any souls save such as confide in Thee alone." *

266. Third suggestion. With regard to vocal prayers, the Director must permit them in greater quantity to such as are not well fitted to unite themselves to God in mental prayer; while he will pursue a contrary course with those who are able to attain to interior recollection by discourse of the mind; for as St. Thomas says, "Vocal prayer is not intended to manifest to God something which is unknown to Him, but to raise to God the

* Sola spes apud te, Domine, miserationis obtinet locum; nec oleum misericordiæ ponis, nisi in vase fiduciæ. Serm. 3., De Annunc.

mind of the person praying, or that of his hearers." * It thus supplies a stimulus which is needed by minds subject to distractions, rather than by such as are devout; these, as it were, of themselves, and by their own reflections, are able to stir, raise aloft, and recollect their souls in God; as the same holy Doctor observes.† The Director will then appoint a greater number of vocal prayers for such as are not able or accustomed to meditate, and a larger measure of mental prayer for those who are exercised in meditation and find therein an aliment for their devotion. He will thus adapt himself to the capacity, inclination and progress of each one of his penitents.

267. Fourth suggestion. There are some persons who recite a great number of vocal prayers, but with little attention and less affection. Such as these speak much with God, but pray little; to them may be applied the words in St. Matthew, *And when you are praying, speak not much, like the heathen.*‡ For as St. Augustine remarks upon this passage: To pray much is not to speak much, but it is to say what is said with deep affection. The excess our Lord here rebukes consists not in praying for a long time, and reciting a great number of prayers, if this be done with inward affection and a devout spirit; but rather in saying much with the tongue, and praying little with the heart. Prayer, whether mental or vocal, is a business in which more is done by sighs than by words, with tears than with the tongue."§ Cassian relates that the Egyptian monks did not approve of a multitude of vocal prayers, but preferred to recite their prayers with great attention

* Vocalis oratio non profertur ad hoc, quod aliquid ignotum Deo manifestetur: sed ad hoc, quod mens orantis, vel aliorum excitetur in Deum. 2, 2, qu. 83, art. 12, ad primum.

† Verba significantia aliquid ad devotionem pertinens excitant mentes præcipue minus devotas. In eod. art., ad 2.

‡ Orantes nolite multum loqui. Matth. vj. 7.

§ Non est hoc orare in multiloquio, si diutius oretur. Aliud est sermo multus, aliud diuturnus affectus. . . . Absit ab oratione multa locutio: sed non desit multa precatio. Nam, *multum loqui*, est, in orando, rem necessariam superfluis agere verbis; multum autem precari, est, ad eum, quem precamur diuturnâ ac piâ cordis excitatione pulsare. Nam plerumque hoc negotium plus gemitibus, quam sermonibus agitur, plus fletu, quam affatu. Ad Probam, Ep. 121, c. 10.

and penetration of their meaning. Hence they considered that it was more profitable to recite ten verses only of a psalm with feelings of devotion and at leisure, than the whole of it with hurry of the tongue and distraction of the mind.* Should the Director, then, meet with persons who have burdened themselves with a huge weight of prayers—which they recite hurriedly, without attention or feeling, caring much more for the completion of their self-imposed task than for the interior devotion of the heart—he must correct this extravagance and reduce the prayers to a third, fourth, or even fifth part, as he shall judge expedient. But he must remind them, meanwhile, to make up for number by the strictness of their attention, to recite the prayers appointed for them at full leisure, with application of mind and with frequent pauses, in order to relish the affections which the prayers express, not as something learned by rote, but as the expression of a feeling proceeding from the heart and made vocal by the tongue.

268. He shall be careful, after having thus reduced the number of their prayers to reasonable bounds, never to allow penitents to omit their religious exercises except for a sufficient reason; for constancy and faithfulness in paying the homage which we have undertaken to render, are most pleasing to God, to the Blessed Virgin, and to the Saints. We may here recall what befell Thomas à Kempis in his youth, when attending the schools of human and divine science.† He began to omit now one, now another of the prayers which it had been his custom daily to recite in honour of the Queen of Heaven, and by this artifice of the Devil, he was led at last to give them up all together. Our Blessed Lady, who loved him tenderly on account of his innocence, resolved to warn him how mistaken he was, and to this end made use of a vision which she vouchsafed to him in the depth of his sleep. He saw himself at school in the company of his class-fellows. Suddenly the Blessed Virgin appeared among them surrounded with rays of glory, and with the beauty which constitutes one of the joys of Paradise.

* Non multitudine versuum, sed mentis intelligentiâ delectantur, illud totâ virtute sectantes: *Psallam spiritu, psallam et mente.* Ideoque utilius habent decem versus cum rationabili assignatione cantari, quam totum psalmum cum confusione mentis effundi, quæ nonnumquam pronunciantis festinatione generatur. De Institut., lib. ij. cap. 11.

† Specul. Exempl., Dist. x., Exempl. 7.

Passing through the school, she tenderly embraced and pressed to her bosom one after another of his companions. Thomas was anxiously awaiting his turn for this sweet embrace, the token of the tenderness of his Heavenly Mother. But his hopes were doomed to disappointment; for when the Blessed Virgin came to him, she glanced at him with a look of displeasure saying, "In vain do you expect caresses from me, since you have proved unfaithful to me. Where are the prayers you once so devoutly addressed to me? Where the homage you once so lovingly paid? How soon has your fervour in honouring me grown cold!" With these words she disappeared, leaving him overwhelmed with anguish of heart. The Director may avail himself of this instance to stimulate his penitents to constancy in the devout exercises they have discreetly adopted.

269. Fifth suggestion. But the Director, besides inculcating attention, interior devotion, and constancy in vocal prayer, must further insist on a becoming exterior deportment. Hence he should advise his penitents to recite their prayers kneeling, and if this cannot be done to choose, at least, some seemly posture; avoiding that immodest bearing which so much displeases the Divine Majesty of Him whom they are addressing in time of prayer. Two monks were once reciting matins sitting, or indeed, I might say reclining, on their beds, when on a sudden a demon appeared in the room bringing with him an abominable stench, which, as he said in raillery of so unbecoming a posture during intercourse with God, was fit incense for such sort of prayer.* The Director should, moreover, rebuke his penitents when, in time of vocal prayer, they employ themselves in any kind of external work; as all occupation should be reputed very unbecoming at a time when we are speaking to God.† The holy Bishop Ludger being once on a journey accompanied by some of his clerics, was one morning reciting the Divine Office with them before the fire. One of his attendants, seeing that the smoke was blowing into the bishop's face, bent down, moved the burning logs, and then blowing upon them, caused the flames to blaze forth. After the Office, the

* Ad talem orationem tale debetur incensum. Jordan. de Saxoniâ. In Vitâ Fratrum Eremit., lib. ij., c. 15.

† In Vitâ S. Ludg. Episc., lib. i., cap. 31. Apud Surium.

Saint, calling aside the Priest, rebuked him sharply for having meddled with the fire while saying his Office, and gave him a penance of some days' duration for this fault. So anxious are the Saints that, while at prayer, nothing should be done by us which can withdraw our minds from God.

270. We must, however, here distinguish between two different ways in which our vocal prayers can be said. At times we may begin to recite certain vocal prayers with the direct purpose of praying, as when we say the Office, the Rosary, or the like. But we may also, while occupied in manual labour, or other outward occupations, say certain prayers, as a means of keeping our minds devoutly employed, as the ancient solitaries used to do; for, while weaving mats, or baskets, of the leaves of the palm-tree, they very commonly recited psalms and hymns, to ward off dissipation of mind during these distracting labours. The observations we have made concerning external work in time of prayer, apply to such prayer as we have first mentioned. But let the Director be particular in rebuking penitents who are slothful, careless and drowsy in time of prayer; as is the case with many Christians who put off their religious exercises till night-time, and then hurry through them as fast as they can, while half asleep and half awake. Such prayers are less acceptable to God than to the devil, who purposely causes this heaviness in order to deprive our prayers of their efficacy. A servant of God once saw a black and hideous serpent gliding over the shoulders of a monk who was in the habit of dozing in choir, and it was given to him to understand that this was the devil who oppressed the unhappy man with sleep.* The Director will not fail, then, to point out suitable remedies which may render persons of this class diligent, earnest and wakeful during their customary devotions.

271. Sixth suggestion. For the sake of such as are blessed with a special gift of prayer, we will add, by way of conclusion, that should it happen to them while they are engaged in this exercise, to find that their soul is raised and wrapped in God, and that vocal prayer would prove a hindrance to this interior recollection, they should discontinue it; always supposing the prayer

* Cæsarius, lib. iv., cap. 32.

not to be of obligation. St. Thomas recommends this; alleging for his reason, that the object of vocal prayer is to raise the mind and heart to God: if, then, far from bringing about, it be an obstacle to, this result, it should not be continued.*

ARTICLE VII.

On the Presence of God.

CHAPTER I.

SCRIPTURE PROOFS OF THE SOVEREIGN EFFICACY OF THE SENSE OF GOD'S PRESENCE AS A MEANS OF SPEEDILY ATTAINING TO PERFECTION. GENERAL REASONS FOR THIS.

272. THE exercise of God's presence amid the distractions continually soliciting our attention, is so closely connected with that prayer, whether mental or vocal, to which both the foregoing Articles have been devoted, that mental prayer may be truly said to consist essentially in a person's keeping himself in God's presence by an effort of the mind alone; and further, that prayer of petition is nothing else than keeping the presence of God before ourselves, and by an act of the mind breaking forth into fervent petition. But more than this, nothing so effectually helps us to acquit ourselves well of prayer, whether mental or vocal (to make which, we withdraw from every other occupation, at stated hours, that we may be quite alone with God), as to have kept in the presence of God throughout the whole course of the day; for as a log of wood, if thoroughly dry—and thus in some sort prepared—kindles as soon as laid upon the fire, so a spiritual man, who has maintained throughout the day by the exercise of God's presence,

* In singulari oratione tantum est vocibus, et hujusmodi signis utendum, quantum proficit ad excitandum interius mentem. Si vero mens per hoc distrahatur, vel qualitercumque impediatur, est a talibus cessandum. 2, 2 qu. 83, art. 12, in corp.

a certain degree of fervour, no sooner applies to prayer, which is the furnace, so to say, of divine love, than his fervour becomes more intense and the flames of charity burst forth within his heart. Hence, it will not be foreign to the matter we have just been treating, if we speak in the present Article of that sense of God's presence which we should ever strive to keep in the midst of indifferent or distracting pursuits. The object, then, of the present Chapter will be to show, by Scripture proofs, and by general reasons, that the realising of the divine presence is one of the most effectual means of speedily attaining to Christian perfection: in the following Chapters we will touch on some special reasons illustrating the same point.

273. God is ever present to us, since He abides in all things by His essence, His presence, and His power; but we cease to be present to Him, at least with our minds, when, forgetful of His Divine Majesty, we allow them to be filled with vain fancies, or to be absorbed in the shadows of earth. Hence it has been well said by St. Bernard, in his treatise "On Consideration" addressed to Pope Eugenius: "Bear in mind, High Priest of God, that so often as you give yourself to the contemplation of things visible and earthly, so often do you withdraw from God."* Whence it follows, that the presence of God, of which we are now speaking, is nothing else than the thought and remembrance of God; by which, in every place, and in every occupation, we consider Him as present to us and turn to Him with the affections of our soul.

274. This sense of the presence of God is so effectual a means of acquiring perfection that, of itself alone, as we may gather from the teachings and examples recorded in Holy Writ, it would seem sufficient to lead to the loftiest summit of perfection. God said to Abraham, *Walk before Me and be perfect*,† as if to say: I, being Almighty, thou hast but to remain in union with Me, and I, by My Almighty power, will overcome every obstacle in the path

* Hoc velim solerter advertas, quia toties peregrinatur consideratio, quoties ab illis rebus (divinis), ad ista deflectitur inferiora, et visibilia. De Consid.

† Ego Dominus omnipotens. Ambula coram me, et esto perfectus. Gen. xvij. 1.

to perfection. And indeed, what else can be required of a man, in order that he fall not short of the perfection suitable to his state of life, but that he do each of his actions as it should be done? Now Solomon says, that the man will attain to this who keeps God ever present to his mind, because the Lord will then take care to guide his every action so that it may not fail of its due perfection.* Hence, too, the Royal Psalmist tells us that to be firm and constant in well-doing we must always seek the face of the Lord.† Now St. Augustine in his commentary on this verse interprets the *face of God* to mean His presence.‡ In short, God declares most unequivocally, by the mouth of the Prophet Micheas, that our goodness and perfection depend upon walking in His presence. I *will show thee, O man, what is good and what the Lord requires of thee: Verily to do judgment, and to love mercy, and to be careful to walk with thy God.*§ And observe the expression *to be careful*, whereby we are warned that the divine presence is to be sought after with great diligence and earnestness, as that one thing upon which our progress in virtue and our perfection mainly depend.

275. And if the reader desire to be further persuaded of this truth, let him observe that, with reference to those great servants of God, praised by the Holy Ghost Himself for their eminent holiness, frequent mention is made in the Old Testament of their having spent all their lives in God's presence. We have but lately seen how, in order to train him to perfection, Abraham was directed, by God Himself, to walk in His presence. That Isaac, too, followed in the footsteps of his saintly father and walked

* In omnibus viis tuis cogita illum, (nempe Deum), et ipse diriget gressus tuos. Prov. iij. 6.

† Quærite Dominum, et confirmamini: quærite faciem ejus semper. Ps. civ. 4.

‡ Quæ est facies Domini, nisi præsentia Dei? sicut facies venti, facies ignis. Dictum est enim: *Sicut stipulam ante faciem venti: Sicut fluit cera a facie ignis:* et multa alia ponit Scriptura, nihil aliud, quam earum rerum præsentiam volens intelligi, quarum nominat faciem.

§ Indicabo tibi, o homo, quid sit bonum, et quid Dominus requirat a te. Utique facere judicium, et diligere misericordiam, et sollicite ambulare cum Deo tuo. Mich. vj. 8.

ever in the sight of the Lord, is clearly stated in the sacred text.* Josephus, in his "History of the Antiquities of the Jews," tells us that the guileless Abel made use of this very means to tend to perfection, and that by keeping God before his eyes in all his doings he manfully practised all kind of virtue.† Of Noah we are told by the Holy Spirit, that he was *a just and perfect man in his generation.*‡ And this is accounted for immediately after; for the Scripture adds, that *he walked with God*, that is, never lost God from his sight.§ Tobias, in his instructions to his much-loved son, lays down, as a most important precept, to have the remembrance of God ever in his mind: *My son, all the days of thy life have God in thy mind.*‖ He who left so magnificent a spiritual legacy to his son, and who, in order that the memory of it might last throughout life, wished that, of all the admonitions given, this one should hold the first place in importance, must certainly himself have always acted up to it. The pious king Ezechias, while striving to touch the heart of God by prayer and to move Him to restore his former health, urges, as that claim which seemed to him the greatest he possessed to the favour of the Almighty, that he had ever walked in the sight of the Lord: *I beseech Thee, O Lord, remember how I have walked before Thee in truth.*¶ It were folly to doubt that the holy King David lived continually in the exercise of the divine presence, as he himself repeatedly witnesses to the fact in many of his Psalms; for instance: *I set the Lord always in my sight.*** And again: *Mine eyes are ever towards the Lord.*†† It must, then, of necessity, be inferred that until God point out another road to perfection, it behoves us also to walk in His divine presence, if we too

* Deus in cujus conspectu ambulaverunt patres nostri Abraham et Isaac, benedicat pueris istis, etc. Gen. xlviij. 15.

† Abel justitiam colebat, et in omnibus actionibus suis Deum præsentem ratus, virtuti operam dabat. Antiquit., lib. i., cap. 3.

‡ Noe vir justus, atque perfectus in generationibus suis. Gen. vj. 9.

§ Cum Deo ambulavit. Ibid.

‖ Omnibus diebus vitæ tuæ, in mente habeto Deum. Tob. iv. 9.

¶ Obsecro, Domine, memento quæso, quomodo ambulaverim coram te in veritate. Isa. xxxviij. 3.

** Providebam Dominum in conspectu meo semper. Ps. xv. 8.

†† Oculi mei semper ad Dominum. Ps. xxiv. 15.

desire to be perfect; for this is the path trodden by the Saints of the Old Law, and by those especially whom God has placed upon this earth to be models, teachers, and guides in all that concerns the perfect life, to all mankind.

276. And the reason why God's presence should be a source of every spiritual grace is most evident. Everything is by so much the more perfect as it approaches nearer to the principle and source of its being. Thus, that water is the clearest which is drawn at the fountain-head. That heat is the most intense which is nearest to the fire by which it is produced. The closer a ray is to the sun from which it proceeds, the brighter does it shine. And on the contrary, the further water is from the well-spring the more troubled it becomes; the intensity of heat is diminished just as its distance from the fire is increased; the ray becomes dimmer and ever dimmer in proportion to its remoteness from the sun. Nor is it otherwise with us when we draw nigh unto God; not indeed physically—for *in Him we live, move, and have our being*—but morally, by making Him present to our minds through our holy thoughts and devout affections. The closer our union with Him, the more do we advance in perfection; while, on the other hand, the further our minds and hearts wander from Him, the more imperfect and wretched do we become. A branch must remain united to its trunk in order to bear fruit. The body, to produce vital acts, must be united with the soul: for, what the trunk is to the branch, that is the soul to the body, inasmuch as the soul is the source and cause of the operations of our body. Thus too, if the Christian would produce perfect works and bear fruits of life eternal, he must, as far as in him lies, remain united to God by his mind and have God ever present in his thoughts; since God alone is the primary and main cause of all our spiritual progress. This reasoning and the accompanying comparisons are all borrowed from St. Gregory of Nazianzus,* who, taking his stand on this solid foundation, goes so far as to say

* Ut corpus animæ, rami arboris trunco, solares radii soli uniti, ut ab illis virtutem suam trahant, esse debent; ita mente Deo uniti esse debemus. *Accedite ad eum*, ait Propheta, *et illuminamini, et facies vestræ non confundentur* In Orat. De Curâ Pauperibus Præstandâ.

that we should think of God as often as we draw our breath.* He concludes by affirming that when we have acquired this habit, we have, as it were, done all, and our perfection is, in a manner, placed out of the reach of danger.†

277. St. Dorotheus relates that the first lesson he gave to his disciple Dositheus, and which he besought him to engrave upon his mind in letters of gold, was this: "Never let thy heart lose sight of God, or forget that He is ever present to thee, and that thou standest always in His sight." ‡ Dositheus obeyed, and in his journeys, at his meals, in his daily toil, ever kept before his mind's eye this divine presence, nor did he lose sight of it in the many serious and very dangerous illnesses which he went through in the course of his religious life. And by this means (Saint Dorotheus adds) from being a dissolute soldier and debauched youth, covered with vices and lost in the pursuit of the vanities of the world, he became in the short space of the five years which he spent in the cloister, a saintly young man and a perfect religious: so much so, indeed, that after his death he was seen enthroned in heavenly glory amid the ranks of the most illustrious anchorites. So true is it—again to quote St. Gregory—that an assiduous and constant use of this means alone will suffice of itself to make us perfect men and even saints.§

CHAPTER II.

PARTICULAR ARGUMENTS TO PROVE THE GREAT EFFICACY OF GOD'S PRESENCE AS A MEANS OF ATTAINING PERFECTION.

278. THE first special reason which shows what great power the thought of God's presence has to draw to perfection all those who

* Nec enim tam sæpe spiritum ducere, quam Dei meminisse debemus.

† Immo, si dici potest, aliud nihil, quam hoc faciendum. Idem, in Or. 1 de Theod.

‡ Numquam corde tuo Deus excidat; cogita semper Deum tibi præsentem, et te coram illo stare. In Vitâ Dosithei.

§ Immo si dici potest, aliud nihil, quam hoc faciendum. Ubi supra.

are really desirous of acquiring it, is this: whosoever abides in God's presence will never commit any wilful sin. All experience shows this. On this very account it was that the Royal Prophet took care to keep himself unceasingly in the sight of God. *Mine eyes are ever towards the Lord, for He shall pluck my feet out of the net.** And elsewhere the holy Prophet, examining into the reason why some walk in the filthy paths of sin without ever leaving them, gives as the chief that they have not God present to them. *They keep not God before their eyes; their ways are ever defiled.*† St. Basil, asking why some are so quick to anger, others so greedy of praise?—why some waste their time in idle and objectless going to and fro?—others again are negligent in their spiritual exercises, and others distracted at their devotions? gives but one answer to all these questions, which is, that they forget how God is ever present to them, watching all their actions; for this thought alone (he continues) were it only constantly borne in mind, would be a sufficient remedy against every vice, and would prevent even every failing.‡

279. And assuredly the holy Doctor is in the right; for as no subject would be daring enough to break the law under the very eyes of his king; as no criminal, however bold, would venture to do wrong in the presence of his judge; so no Christian is so abandoned as knowingly to violate the laws of God, his Sovereign Lord, and King, and Judge, while conscious of being in His immediate presence. The sole remembrance of God present, suffices, says St. Ephrem, to cool down the most violent heat of passion, to enable us to preserve our souls ever spotless, and to fit ourselves by this alone to be the dwelling-place of the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, the forgetfulness of God's presence is enough to make us capable of every guilty excess, in suchwise that our souls may become sinks of filth and darkness. Thus, he adds,

* Oculi mei semper ad Dominum, quoniam ipse evellet de laqueo pedes meos. Ps. xxiv. 15.

† Non est Deus in conspectu ejus, inquinatæ sunt viæ illus in omni tempore. Ps. x. 5.

‡ Hæc enim recordatio, si assidua esset, contra omnia vitia sufficiens remedium esse posset. In Quæstionibus Fuse Explic., qu. 30.

there can be no question that nothing is worse than to forget God and to lose sight of His presence.*

280. The Saint proceeds to illustrate his teaching by a very practical and memorable instance, which may find place here, although it be well known, since it is excellently well calculated to impress this most important truths on our minds.† While St. Ephrem was living in Edessa, a shameless public woman, accustomed to lay snares for the virtue of her neighbours, feared not to assail the heroic purity of the Saint. He listened to her infamous solicitations, seemingly unmoved, and replied that he was ready to agree to her proposals, if she were but willing to accompany him to the spot which he had already chosen for the perpetration of the crime. The woman answered that she was willing to go wherever he might wish. "Well," said St. Ephrem, "let us go at once into the thick of the town, and commit sin there, where the people are most numerous and the crowd greatest." Astounded at this proposal, the wretched woman objected that it would be too shameful to commit such excesses under the public eye. Then the Saint, all burning with a holy indignation, exclaimed with a loud voice, "How much more shameful will it not be to commit this excess in the sight of the God of infinite majesty, Who is in every place, and beholds everything that is done!" The heart of the abandoned woman was pierced by these words as by a barbed arrow, and casting her eyes upon the ground, she began to shed tears and to sob aloud. Then falling at the Saint's feet, overwhelmed with contrition and shame, she craved his pardon, and besought him to guide her back to the path of eternal life, whence she had so miserably strayed. The Saint, overjoyed at having made capture of her who meant to entrap him in her snares, took her to a convent of holy women, where for the remainder of her days she mourned bitterly

* Nihil pejus graviusque est, quam ipsius Dei oblivionem capere; continuâ enim Dei recordatione turpes animæ passiones recedunt, instar maleficorum, prætore accedente: unde et mundum Spiritûs Sancti habitaculum efficitur. Ubi vero memoria Dei abest; ibi tenebræ cum fætore dominantur, omnisque res improba exercetur. De Virtut., tom. ii., cap. 10.

† Metaphrast. In Vitâ S. Ephrem.

over her past evil courses. So great is the power which the thought of God's presence possesses to make us refrain from evil.

281. A story somewhat similar to the foregoing is related of Thaïs, once a notorious courtesan, afterwards a renowned penitent; but in her case, it was not the woman who began an assault against a servant of God, but she herself, for her good fortune, was the person assaulted.* The holy Abbot Paphnutius went to seek out this sinful creature, being determined to overcome the hardness of her heart with the resistless weapon of the divine presence. The servant of God pretending to be overwhelmed with confusion, and trembling with fright in every limb, accosted the infamous woman, and in a faltering voice inquired whether there was any chance whatever of their being seen if they sinned together there and then. The woman, in order to relieve his fears and confusion, boldly answered, "There is no fear of any one in the world seeing us here; except God, of course: He sees and knows everything." On receiving this reply, Paphnutius, changing his pretended fear for a genuine zeal, exclaimed: "What, then, you believe that God sees you, and yet you have the audacity to sin in His presence?† You believe that you are standing before your Judge, Who will punish every single crime that you commit, and you are not frightened of provoking His wrath?" At the sound of these words, at the brightness of the divine presence which flashed like lightning into her mind on the very spot, Thaïs was most deeply touched. She did not speak, for her sighs and tears choked up the channel of her words; but although her tongue was silent, her actions spoke. She gathered together all that she had earned by her infamous profession—her silks, her ribbons, her shawls, jewels, bracelets, rings—her sumptuous and expensive dresses; then she burned them all in a heap, in a public square of the city, most justly devoting to the flames the vain gauds which had too often served to light up the fire of impure desires in so many hearts. She then withdrew at once into a convent, and by direction of Paphnutius, remained for three whole years confined to her cell, without ever leaving it, with no other sustenance than bread

* Sabellic. Lib. v. Exempl., cap. 2.

† Credis Deum nihil latere, et coram illo peccare non erubescis?

and water: her only prayer during this long interval being to repeat with mournful voice and heartfelt sorrow, "O Lord! Thou that hast created me, have pity on me!"* In the meantime, Paul, a disciple of the holy Abbot Antony, beheld in a vision a resplendent throne in heaven, having the form of a couch, all ornamented with gold and precious stones, and wrought with most cunning skill. Enraptured at the sight, the holy man asked if this bright and glorious throne was destined for his master, the great Saint Antony? It was answered, "No, not for Antony; but for Thaïs, the sinner." The sequel confirmed the vision, for having at length been taken out of this cell—or dungeon perhaps I ought to say—immured in which she had spent three years together, she died at the end of a fortnight, and went to her rest on that splendid couch which she had prepared by her course of penitential exercises.

282. Now, if a momentary glance at the presence of God, could thus avail to draw abandoned women out of the slough of sin in which they were buried, and in an instant to burst asunder the fetters with which their guilty loves and impure delights had held them fast-bound, can we imagine that pious and well-disposed souls will not find in the thought of God's presence, especially if frequently renewed, a most effectual preservative, not only against grievous falls, but more than this, against even venial sins? St. John Chrysostom assures us most positively that if anything can secure us from saying, or doing, or so much as thinking, aught that is evil, it is the reflection that God is present to us, and not only beholds our outward actions, but searches into the inmost recesses of our hearts.† "Tell me," continues the Saint, "if you had to abide always in the presence of your Sovereign, with what circumspection and caution, with what reverential awe, would you not behave? Whether then you eat, or drink, or sleep, or amuse yourself, when you are tempted to anger, or whatever else happens to you, think

* Qui plasmasti me, miserere mei.

† Si cogitaverimus, Deum ubique præsentem esse, omnia audire, omnia videre, non solum quæ opere fiunt et quæ dicuntur, sed et quæ in corde sunt omnia, et quæ in profundo sunt animi, judex enim est cogitationum et consiliorum cordis. Si ita nos ipsos disposuerimus, nihil mali faciemus, nihil mali dicemus, nihil mali cogitabimus. Homil. 8, ad Phil. ij.

that God is close at hand, and be assured that this thought will so restrain you, that you will never give way to any unseemly mirth, nor even to a single act of impatience or anger."*

283. A mere Pagan, such as was Seneca, knew how efficacious a preservative from sin it would be to imagine oneself ever in the presence of some person of authority, who is witness of all our actions. But deprived as he was of the light of faith, and possessing no other knowledge of God than the imperfect notions supplied by nature, he advised his friend Lucillus to keep ever before his eyes some good and virtuous man, and to imagine that this person was continually looking at him; and Seneca assured his friend, that by means of this imaginary witness of his actions, he would avoid the great majority of his sinful doings.† Now if the mere fancy that some one is present to us, who, in reality, is absent, appeared to this philosopher an all-sufficient means to preserve us from most of our ordinary faults; who can doubt but that the very true and most real presence of a God of infinite might and of infinite majesty, will avail with exceeding great power to keep us from all sin, either mortal or venial, and to preserve our conscience in perfect purity and stainlessness? We are told that the mere look of St. Romuald, mild and gentle as he was, sufficed to curb the pride of Roger, the Marquis of Tuscany, to such an extent, that the colour fled from his cheeks and he could scarce find breath to speak a word in his own defence.‡ How much more, then, will not the presence of the all-pure, thrice-holy God, avail to restrain our lust, and check the violence and rage of our passions, so as to keep us from transgressing, whether in things great or small, the bounds of what is right and just.

* Dic mihi, si tibi semper prope principem standum esset, non cum timore adstares? Quando comedis, cogita præsentem Deum, adest enim. Quando dormiturus es; quando irasceris; quando deliciaris, et quidquid tandem feceris: cogita adesse Deum; nunquam in risum incides, nunquam ad iram accenderis.

† Aliquis vir bonus nobis eligendus est; et semper ante oculos habendus; ut sic, tamquam illo spectante, vivamus, et omnia tamquam illo vidente faciamus. Hoc, mi Lucilli, Epicurus præcepit; custodem nobis et pædagogum dedit; nec immerito: maxima pars peccatorum tollitur, si peccaturis testis assistat. Epist. 11.

‡ In Vitâ S. Romualdi. Surius, tom. iii.

284. The more so as our God, Whose holiness and purity are so great, is our Judge also, and as such observes all our doings, notes down our every word, considers attentively our every thought, in order to call us at the appointed time to a rigorous account, and to execute strict justice for every transgression, however slight. Hence it would seem impossible for us to be conscious of the gaze of this most pure Eye ever fixed upon us, and to do in sight of the Lord what is displeasing to Him and what makes us liable to the penalties and chastisements which His incorruptible justice will inflict. St. Peter Damian has left on record* that a certain man, much given to charitable deeds, was tempted successfully by our common enemy, who is ever on the watch for our spiritual ruin, to commit a grievous theft. Shortly after our Blessed Lord appeared to him in the guise of a beggar, with his hair strangely long, and frightfully in disorder. At the sight of the wretched object, he was moved to pity, and taking the beggar aside, he began to cut his hair for him. While occupied in this work of charity, he beheld at the back of the man's head two most bright-shining eyes. At this sight, the scissors dropped from his hands out of very fear, and, terrified to death, he began to tremble from head to foot. The beggar then said to him, "I am Jesus Christ. I behold everything: and with these My eyes have witnessed the theft which thou hast committed." Having said these words, He vanished out of sight. The reader should then ever bear in mind that the eyes of God are always looking upon him, and he may rest assured that thus he will secure himself against any wilful fall into grievous sin.

CHAPTER III.

OTHER REASONS TO PROVE THE EFFICACY OF THE DIVINE PRESENCE AS A MEANS OF ATTAINING PERFECTION.

285. It is as difficult to walk in God's presence without acquiring solid virtue, and feeling enkindled within us, little by little, the

* Epist. 8, cap. 8.

ardours of divine love, as it would be to stand always before the fire and not to feel warmth; inasmuch as the soul, basking continually, or frequently, in the rays of the Sun of Justice, gains light to know the beauty of Christian virtue, and soon grows enamoured of it, and readily practises it. At the sight of those divine charms to which our mind's eye turns amid its several occupations, we soon begin to love them and to be set on fire with the consuming flames of divine charity. Whatever light the planets shed on this earth of ours, they have it not of themselves, nor is it evolved from their own substance, but they receive it all from the sun. Although they shine so brilliantly in the firmament, they are indebted for all their splendour to that mighty orb by which they are enkindled. Imagine for a moment that, by an impossibility, the planets could flee from the presence of the sun and hide themselves away from its radiance; they would at once become darker than is our earth in the thick of the blackest night. In the same way, all those servants of God who shine as stars in the firmament of the Church by the lustre of their virtues, have all the light and fervour whereby they are enabled to do virtuous actions imparted to them by the Divine Sun in whose glorious presence they ever dwell. This it is which enkindled in their hearts the fire of divine charity: for as, to warm ourselves, there is no other means than to stand in the sunshine or before a fire; so too, the most effectual means to obtain the heat of charity is ever to stand as much as possible in the radiance of that sun of beauty and of that fire of love.* Hence St. Laurence Justinian observes, "I am not aware of the existence of any means so effectual for curbing the rebellion of the flesh, for gaining purity of heart, and for scaling rapidly the heights of Christian virtue, as the frequent remembrance of our ever being under the eye of that Divine Judge Who beholds all things."† St. Basil sees in this exercise a kind of mutual action and reaction which makes us steadily advance in the path

* Deus caritas est.

† Nihil reor sic efficax ad internam adipiscendam munditiem, et ad virtutum arcem consequendam, necnon ad conterendas carnis delectationes, quæ adversus animam militare noscuntur, quemadmodum cogitare, se adstare semper ante oculos judicis cuncta cernentis. Lib. de Grad. Perfect., cap. 6.

of perfection. For the thought of God's presence naturally awakens within us those feelings of charity and love which render us careful and anxious to keep His commandments most exactly. Now, the careful and exact observance of God's precepts, in its turn, increases this charity in the soul, fosters it, fixes and makes it lasting. For this reason the Saint would have us ever bear the thought of God's presence indelibly graven upon the tablets of our hearts.* But if it be true that the thought of God's presence affords such valuable help towards the speedy acquisition of every virtue—and of charity in particular, from which the other virtues borrow all their lustre, and by which they are ennobled—it follows that it is also a most effectual means of becoming perfect in a short time.

286. It may further be observed that no other thing is so well calculated to strengthen us against the seductions of our fellowmen, the persecutions of our enemies, and the assaults of the devil, as to preserve in our minds the lively remembrance of our God being always present to us. What was it that made Susanna so courageous during the wanton solicitations and violent threats of the impure judges in Israel? What kept her firm in so terrible a crisis? The presence of God. These two elders assailed her with cunning speeches, saying, *Behold the doors of the orchard are shut, and nobody seeth us.*† On hearing these words, the heroic woman heaved a deep sigh and said, "God sees us. No evil can be so great as to *sin in the sight of the Lord.*"‡ Again, what was it that rendered the Machabees invincible against the assaults of their most formidable enemies? What made them superior to the countless hosts that were brought against them? Once more the same answer: the thought of God's presence. For Judas Machabeus with his warrior band, seeing the formidable army of their enemies ad-

* Impressam in animis nostris piam de Deo cogitationem, velut indelebile aliquod signum circumferamus. Siquidem hæc est oratio, per quam acquiri caritas consuevit, quæ simul cum ad observanda ipsa Dei mandata nos excitet, tum vicissim quoque ab iisdem ipsa ad perpetuitatem stabilis conservetur. In Reg. Fusius Disp., Quæst. 5.

† Ecce ostia pomarii clausa sunt, et nemo nos videt. Daniel xiij. 20.

‡ Ingemuit Susanna, et ait. . . . Melius est mihi absque opere incidere in manus vestras, quam peccare in conspectu Domini. Ibid. 22, 23.

vancing full of fury to put them to the sword, merely lifted up their minds to God and rushed to the attack. They fought with their arms in their hands and with the thought of God in their hearts. Their countenances showed fury but, as the sacred text tells us, they cherished in their souls a feeling of marvellous delight in the presence of that God Who was vouchsafing to them so many favours. And thus it came to pass that they left no less than five-and-thirty-thousand of the enemy slain on the battle-field.* So too, may it be in our own case. Our enemies may come with persecutions, they may make us a by-word on account of their slanders, they may overwhelm us with their outrages, scoffs, and derision; but if we keep ourselves ever in God's presence we shall surely carry away the palm of victory. God will give us the shield of long-suffering, the breastplate of meekness, the helmet of courage, wherewith we shall be able to parry their every blow, to bear with all in peace; nor shall their arrows find their way to our hearts. Rather from these great conflicts shall we derive a lively satisfaction; for God will strengthen us with His gracious help, and we shall pass through the serried ranks of our adversaries, *greatly cheered with the presence of God.*

287. As to the assaults of evil spirits, this divine presence, if we bear it constantly in mind, will render us not only strong to withstand them, but invincible, impregnable to all their attacks. Holy Job, who had been so sorely exercised in these conflicts with the powers of hell, says, "Lord, place me by Thee, that I may be aware of Thy presence, and though all hell wreak its fury upon me, I shall in nowise be afraid."† Nor was it without a cause that this most valiant athlete spoke such language; for if soldier so craven cannot be found but would feel courage arise in his heart when he does battle in presence of his general or his king, and this, moreover, that he may gain a fading and *corruptible crown*,‡ how much more will not a Christian, with the pro-

* Judas et qui cum eo erant, invocato Deo, per orationes congressi sunt, manu quidem pugnantes, sed Dominum cordibus orantes, prostraverunt non minus triginta quinque millia, præsentiâ Dei magnifice delectati. 2 Machab. xv. 25.

† Pone me juxta te; et cujusvis manus pugnet contra me. Job xvij. 3.

‡ Et illi quidem ut corruptibilem coronam accipiant. 1 Cor. vi. 25.

spect of an immortal and never-fading diadem, bravely withstand the assaults of his hellish foes, if only he bear in mind that he is seen by the eye of that God Who is helping and supporting him in all his struggles? St. Athanasius informs us that the holy Abbot Antony* had, on a certain day, suffered very fearful assaults from some evil spirits. These infernal fiends had so cruelly torn him with scourges, and so mercilessly beaten him with clubs, that the Saint was left bleeding and well-nigh lifeless under their blows. In the midst of these dread tortures nothing troubled the holy man so much as the thought that God had abandoned him to the fury of his enemies. When lo! on a sudden, he beheld the roof of his cell open, and a bright light descend therein, which in the depth of the midnight darkness made the humble abode shine with the glories of paradise. Then, in the midst of the glory, he quickly perceived the resplendent majesty of his loving and beloved Redeemer. At this sight the holy Abbot exclaimed, "Where wert Thou then, all this time, O good Lord Jesus? Where wert Thou while the demons were beating me so barbarously? Why didst Thou not come to the rescue at the beginning of so terrible an assault?† Jesus answered as follows: "Antony, I was here, and though hidden from thy sight I beheld thy conflict: I it was who gave thee courage to withstand the attacks of thy foes, strength to bear with their taunts, and my delight was to be a witness of thy constancy."‡ At this apparition of Christ the demons straightway vanished, as the mists of night disperse before the rising sun; the heart of the Saint was freed from all trouble and alarm, his bruises were healed at once, and he felt himself so inwardly strengthened and so full of courage, that he would gladly have exposed himself to the like, and even to more dreadful combats. Happy, then, the man who has taught himself to walk with a lively faith in the presence of his God; for at what time his infernal foes shall pursue him with their evil suggestions, he will find himself fully equipped for

* In Vita S. Antonii.

† Ubi eras, bone Jesu, ubi eras? Quare non a principio affuisti, ut sanares vulnera mea?

‡ Antoni, hic eram, et exspectabam videre certamen tuum.

the struggle; because the assurance that the Almighty is close at hand will, in like manner, encourage him to withstand their attacks; and he too will thus be enabled to say with the Psalmist, I fear none of the temptations that the devil may have the power to excite in my mind or heart, for Thou, O God, art always with me, and I am ever with Thee.*

CHAPTER IV.

VARIOUS METHODS OF DEVOUTLY AND PROFITABLY CULTIVATING THE PRESENCE OF GOD.

288. The first way in which we may commendably bear in mind the presence of God while occupied in our worldly business, is by the aid of the imagination. But as God cannot be truthfully represented as He is in Himself, by this faculty of our soul—for He has neither body, nor shape, nor figure, nor other thing that can be imaged in the fancy—it will be necessary for such as employ this means of keeping themselves in the presence of God, to picture Him to their minds as He was upon earth. They must consequently set before their mind's eye our loving Saviour in such form as may be the most favourable to their devotion and recollection of spirit. Some there are whom the sight of the Infant Jesus greatly moves; others again are more touched at the view of Jesus as the Man of Sorrows, chiefly during His Passion; while others are to be found who prefer the thought of Jesus risen and glorified. On this account many have a great facility of keeping our Blessed Lord before them on the bosom of His dear Mother; others have the same ease in representing Him to themselves in a piteous aspect as upon the Cross, or when being scourged at the pillar, all dripping with His sacred blood; others love to behold Him in His risen Majesty, to figure Him to themselves as He is on high, crowned with rays of glory, clad in brightness, *dwelling*

* Non timebo mala, quoniam tu mecum es. Ps. xxij. 4.

*in light inaccessible,** and they entertain themselves with Him in this state, giving place to the various feelings of love, oblation, petition, compassion, joy, and such other affections as their devotion may suggest. "In this," says Thomas à Kempis, "consists the true love of Christ; to keep Him ever present to our minds; never to suffer His image (as far at least as we are able) to fade from our imagination; to direct all our actions to Him; to refer to Him whatever we read, or hear, or do; in all things to seek to work out His will; and never to prefer any single thing to His holy love." †

289. St. Teresa in her works speaks very strongly in commendation of this pious exercise, and is earnest in counselling persons who have the spirit of prayer to engage themselves in this sweet conversation with God, as a very effectual means of speedily attaining purity of conscience and of scaling the heights of a lofty contemplation. However, we should add two things by way of caution:—First, that they who thus keep Christ ever present to them must not care to go into all the details of feature, gesture, countenance, colour and such like peculiarities; as attention to these unimportant particulars would only have the effect of fatiguing the brain. But having set before the mind a sort of general representation of our Blessed Redeemer, and giving, as it were, a passing glance at His Godhead, we should without delay stir up our affections; for this can be done without effort or any straining of the bodily organs. The next thing which it is necessary for us to bear in mind is, that this mode of keeping ourselves in God's presence (by aid of the imagination) is better suited to such as have the gift of prayer than to those who are not so gifted; for the supernatural light with which the former abound enables them to move easily, and without labouring, their imagination and

* Qui lucem inhabitat inaccessibilem. 1 Cor. vj. 16.

† Disce ergo, O homo, ad ejus amorem et honorem cuncta exercitia tua trahere et ordinare; et tamquam præsentem Jesum, in omni loco et tempore attendere . . . Hoc est Christum per fidem et dilectionem habitare in corde tuo, oculos mentis ab ejus imaginatione nunquam avertere, ad ejus beneplacitum semper tendere, et nihil ejus amori præponere; sed quidquid boni audieris, vel legeris, vel feceris, ad ipsum totaliter reducere et finaliter referre. Lib. De Discip. Claustrali, cap. 13.

affections; and hence they can persevere in the presence of the Redeemer without overtasking the brain: while those who have not the gift of prayer are unable to do this without much effort, so that it were hardly possible that, in course of time, they should not weaken their head, to the serious detriment both of body and mind. Such persons should be advised, in preference, to keep in God's presence by faith, in the way which I shall now explain.

290. The second mode of remaining in the divine presence is by faith alone, independently of any particular effort of the imagination; and it is practised by making acts of lively faith, that God is very close to each one of us; that He hems us in on all sides; and that His all-searching eye is looking upon us, and taking note of our every action. As a bird in its flight is wholly surrounded by the air; as an atom dancing in a sunbeam is penetrated by the light; as a fish gliding about in the depths of the ocean has the sea around it on every side: so too are we, whithersoever we may go, wheresoever we may stay, surrounded by the omnipresence of the Lord. If we turn to the right, we find God: if to the left, He is there: if we soar aloft, still there is God: if we go down to the uttermost depths, we ever find God present. And, as St. Augustine observes, God cannot help seeing our every movement, every step that we take, every action however unimportant, that we perform:—just as though, having banished the rest of the world from His mind, He were wholly absorbed in the contemplation of each one of us alone. And in very truth, the infinite and incommunicable light of God's countenance knows no waning nor increase, whether He cast His eyes on the innumerable hosts of created beings, or confine them to the consideration of a single one.* "And," continues the holy Doctor, "as nothing can escape God's sight, for He beholds all we

* Sic gressus meos semitasque consideras, et die noctuque super custodiam meam vigilas, omnes semitas meas diligenter notans, speculator perpetuus; et veluti si totius creaturæ tuæ, cœli, terræque oblitus, tantum me solum consideres, et nihil sit tibi curæ de aliis. Neque enim tibi crescit lux incommutabilis visionis tuæ, si tantum unum aspicias: neque minuitur, si innumera videas et diversa. Soliloq. c. 14.

do, and hears everything that we say; all is marked, all is taken down, all is written in the book of His judgments: in order to assign, when the time comes, the reward which our works have merited, or the chastisement which they have deserved,"* This mode of keeping God present to us cannot tire the mind, nor can it weaken the organ of the brain; for in order to have God present to us, according to this method, nothing further is required than that we should bear in mind what faith teaches us of God's immensity, and then yield to a simple and loving consent; besides which, it is useful in the highest degree, since it maintains the soul in filial love and fear, and renders us careful, cautious and much upon our guard, lest in any of our actions we offend that most High God, Whose watchful eye is always looking at us, without ever, for a moment, averting from us its penetrating glance.

291. Akin to the presence of God, thus considered as external to us, is a very advantageous practice; that of beholding God in the divers creatures which come before us in the course of our daily occupations. Some at one time consider God in the flowers, at another in the verdure; now in the plants, now in the stars; one day in the planets, another day in the firmament; again in the properties of the several kinds of animals; or again in the actions of their fellow-men; or, once more, in the divers events, whether prosperous or untoward, that are daily brought before our notice. And in all of these they admire, sometimes the power, sometimes the beauty, sometimes the grandeur, sometimes the providence, sometimes the loving-kindness of their God; and with pious reflections such as these they fan the flame of divine love which burns within their heart. Thus, for instance, did Simon Salo, in his country walks, at the sight of the green meadows and pleasant hills, lift up his thoughts to the contemplation of the divine perfections, and striking the flowers and plants with his stick, "Be still! be still!" he would say to them, "you speak to my heart, and tell me to love the God Who is the author of all your many charms. Be still!

* Quidquid cogito et in quocumque delector, tu vides, aures tuæ audiunt, oculi tui vident et considerant; signas, attendis, notas, et scribis in libro tuo sive bonum fuerit, sive malum, ut reddas postea, pro bono præmia, et pro malo supplicia. Soliloq. c. 14.

My heart knows what you mean, and is already on fire with the love of God." Thus too, St. Augustine, considering the heavens and the earth, with the countless creatures that make them so beauteous and enchanting, heard a voice in his heart saying to him, "Love Him Who is the first cause of so many beautiful creations."*

292. There is a third way of forming the presence of God within us. St. Paul tells us that we are God's temples and the dwelling-place of the Holy Ghost. *Know you not that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?*† The kings of this earth have for their residences, it is true, the whole of the royal palace; but there is an apartment in which they dwell in a particular manner—a presence-chamber, where seated on a splendid throne they give audience, receive petitions, dispense favours, and show special marks of their sovereign dominion. So too, although God Almighty is present everywhere, and in every place, He has set up His throne in our souls and abides therein, as in His temple, to receive the tribute of our special homage. It is there that He hearkens to our prayers; there He wills that we should entertain ourselves with Him; there deigns to accept the tribute of our affections; there holds more immediate intercourse with our souls; and there scatters His graces upon us with a more lavish hand. Why, then, seek God outside of ourselves and far from us, if He be within us, within our innermost soul, within the very centre of our being; and with a presence moreover which, to us at least, is more special than with anything else? We may then say with St. Basil, "Let every soul that would be a spouse of Christ, and that would hold sweet and loving converse with Him, retire within itself; withdraw to its innermost recesses amid the divers workings of its outward senses: there let it unite itself to God with a love as unintermittent as may be; and there let it entertain itself in His company with loving colloquy of the heart, and devout reflections of the understanding."‡

* Cœlum et terra clamant, Domine, ut amem te.

† Nescitis, quia, templum Dei estis; et Spiritus Dei habitat in vobis? 1 Cor. iij. 16.

‡ Cum enim cæteris, qui beati esse student, tum sponsæ Christi in primis convenit, operationes animæ, quæ per sensus fiunt, ab exterioribus ad interiora c » vertere, et sponso in intimis thalamis, ut Deo, Dei verbo perpetuâ dilec-

293. St. Catherine of Sienna knew well how to put this teaching of St. Basil into practice, trained as she was in the school of her Spouse, Christ Jesus.* She had been purposely deprived by her parents of all opportunity of withdrawing to her own private room for the purpose of recollecting herself in devout prayer to God; but she built for herself another private chamber in her own interior, in which, during her daily toil, she ever remained in retirement conversing lovingly with the God of her heart. Thus she received no spiritual detriment from the persecution of those of her own household, and from the snares which the devil set for her by their means; on the contrary she reaped great spiritual profit from them all; since if she was compelled at times, before this happened, to leave her room in order to attend to her various domestic duties, she afterwards never withdrew from the new cell which she had built up in her heart, but dwelt in it without interruption, calmly recollected in her God. And so great was the profit accruing to her from this retirement, that she used frequently to exhort her Confessor, the Blessed Raymond of Capua (as he relates in her life) to make within himself a like dwelling, to which, in the midst of his various occupations, he might retire apart with God.

294. St. Teresa elsewhere commends in the highest terms this manner of cultivating God's presence in our souls, saying that it greatly disposes to infused recollection of spirit, which is itself a degree of contemplation. She remarks that if we will but get the habit of retiring with God into the little heaven of the soul, without allowing outward objects to distract us, we shall walk by a most excellent way, which soon will lead us to refresh ourselves with the living waters of contemplation at the fountain of the Godhead; for by this means a long journey is swiftly made, and the soul is borne to the harbour of union with God, with sails full-spread. To quote her very words: "They, who in this wise, are able to shut themselves up in this little heaven of the soul, in which abides the God Who has made the earth, and is our Maker

tione sociari, cum eo colloqui, et in ejus, die noctuque, lege meditari. De Virginit.

* Surius. In Vitâ S. Cath. Senen.

too,—if they but train themselves not to gaze upon, nor remain amid, the distractions of the outward senses—may be assured that they have taken a most excellent way, which must lead them to drink the waters of life at the fountain-head; for in a short time they will make much way, even as one sailing in a ship accompanied with favourable winds soon reaches the port to which he is bound."* I therefore exhort the reader to adopt this third method of living in the presence of God, as the most useful and profitable of the three described above; and amid his daily occupations, often to retire within himself, there to converse with God, giving way to supplication, or desires, or acts of self-oblation; of love, or thanksgiving, or praise; as he may feel himself inwardly moved by the spirit of grace. *The kingdom of God is within us*;† how, then, can it serve our purpose to seek it elsewhere?

CHAPTER V.

CERTAIN METHODS FOR RENDERING MORE EASY THE EXERCISE OF GOD'S PRESENCE IN THE MIDST OF OUR EXTERIOR EMPLOYMENTS.

295. To dwell continually in the presence of God, with the mind ever fixed upon Him, is a happiness reserved for our heavenly home and to which we may not pretend in this life. The divers affairs which necessarily claim our attention withdraw our minds from God; the objects presented to us by our senses entice, bewitch, and estrange us from Him; our natural bent or turn of character, by inclining us to the things of sense, withdraws our thoughts and affections from the Supreme Good. So that it is morally impossible to keep God's presence always in our minds, without any kind of interruption. What can be done, and what it behoves every one aspiring to perfection to aim at in all earnestness, is to render this presence as continual as our natural powers, and those bestowed upon us by grace, can make it. But as this

* Way of Perfection, chap. 28.

† Regnum Dei intra nos est. Luc. xvij. 21.

is to be done without any anxiety or trouble of mind, and without any undue effort of the brain, but gently and peacefully (else it could not be lasting) we will now set forth three methods which may render easy so devout and profitable an exercise.

296. The first method of remaining always in the presence of God with great ease to ourselves, is frequently to raise our hearts to Him by fervent ejaculatory prayers. As is well known, these prayers are nothing more than short but fervent acts of devout affection, shot forth like arrows in order to strike at once the heart of God and inflame the heart of him who produces them. St. Augustine in a letter to a devout lady, Proba by name, exhorting her to the frequent practice of these ejaculations, alleges the example of the Egyptian solitaries, who used during their manual works to lift up their hearts to God by fervent aspirations of this nature.* Now, as is plain, these acts may be practised with the greatest ease at all times and in all places, by all who are really concerned for their perfection; whether we be walking in the public streets or dealing with our neighbours, or occupied with any kind of handiwork, or taking our meals, or rising in the morning; in every petty detail, in fact, of our daily round of duty. And why should not the devout Christian in every possible circumstance of life lift up his mind to God and implore His help, with that beautiful prayer of holy David which the early monks had ever in their mouths, *O God, come to my assistance! O Lord, make haste to help me?* † or again, to ask for cleanness of heart, *Create a clean heart in me, O God, and renew a right spirit within me?* ‡ or to manifest to God our desire of possessing Him, *As the hart pants after the fountains of water, so my soul panteth after thee, O God?* § or to

* Dicuntur fratres in Ægypto crebras quidem habere orationes, sed eas tamen brevissimas, et raptim quodammodo jaculatas, ne illa vigilanter erecta, quæ oranti plurimum necessaria est, per productiores moras evanescat, neque hebetetur intentio. Epist. cxxj. Ad Probam, cap. 10.

† Deus, in adjutorium meum intende. Domine, ad adjuvandum me festina. Ps. lxix. 2.

‡ Cor mundum crea in me, Deus, et spiritum rectum innova in visceribus meis. Ps. l. 12.

§ Quemadmodum desiderat cervus ad fontes aquarum, ita desiderat anima mea ad te, Deus. Ps. xlj. 1.

make Him an unreserved offering of ourselves, *My Beloved to me, and I to Him?** or to return Him grateful thanks for the manifold blessings which He bestows upon us at every moment, *What shall I render to the Lord for all the things that He hath rendered to me?*† or to crave forgiveness for all the offences by which we daily displease Him, *Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy great mercy?*‡ or to declare the conformity of our wills with that of God, in whatever may befall us, *Teach me to do Thy will, for Thou art my God;*§ *Not my will, but Thine be done;*‖ *Not as I will, but as Thou wilt?*¶ All this may be done by each and every one who wishes in any way to advance in spirit, and to lift himself above himself, that he may live with God.

297. On the other hand, this method of keeping in the presence of God throughout the day is equally safe and advantageous. It is *safe* and prudent, since it enables those who are spiritually inclined, to keep in God's presence without strain on the mind or injury to the bodily organs, by the use of such passing acts, frequently renewed. It is *profitable*, for the necessary result of such acts is to foster within us the fervour of that devotion which renders us quick to do good, but slow to do evil though quick to shun it. But what is more than all besides (as St. John Chrysostom observes) it shuts the door against the devil, who, on seeing a man in close company with God and far beyond all danger of consenting to sin, does not venture on an attempt to effect an entry into his heart by means of his wicked suggestions.**

298. The same Saint sets forth, by a very apt and fitting comparison the advantages accruing to devout persons from these fervent ejaculations. As it is not sufficient, if we would keep

* Dilectus meus mihi, et ego illi. Cant. ij. 16.

† Quid retribuam Domino pro omnibus quæ retribuit mihi? Ps. cxv. 12.

‡ Miserere mei, Deus, secundum magnam misericordiam tuam. Ps. l. 1.

§ Doce me facere voluntatem tuam, quia Deus meus es tu. Ps. cxli. 9.

‖ Non mea, sed tua voluntas fiat. Luc. xxij. 42.

¶ Non sicut ego volo sed sicut tu. Matth. xxvj. 39.

** Si per intervalla crebris precationibus te ipsum accendas, non dabis occasionem diabolo, et ullum ad suas cogitationes aditum. Hom. 4. De Fide Annæ.

water warm, to put it on the fire once only, but it needs to be kept there, else little by little it loses its heat and becomes cold as heretofore; so neither does it suffice in order to become fervent and spiritual that we enkindle holy affections within us early in the morning by an attentive and prolonged meditation, but we must frequently during the course of the day, by these ejaculations, draw nigh to the fire of divine love, that is to God Himself, if we would wish to keep up the heat of the fervour which was kindled in the morning; otherwise we should soon relapse into our natural coldness and torpor.*

299. Another method we may suggest, of remaining in the presence of God during the distracting occupations of the day, is to offer them all to God with the pure intention of doing His most holy will and of pleasing Him in all. At the beginning of each duty, whether of great or little importance, spiritual persons should lift up their minds to God, protesting with all sincerity that in the occupation, whatever it may be—study, business, labour—we seek not our own pleasure, our own interest, our own reputation, or any other private end, but merely to fufil His holy will and to be well-pleasing in His sight. And in the progress of our actions, we should frequently renew this holy and loving intention, and continue what we are doing with an unaffected desire of pleasing God in all we do. In this manner, even our most trivial and animal actions, such as our meals, our sleep, our labour, when accompanied with this intention, will be changed, by a sort of heavenly alchemy, into the gold of sanctifying and meritorious works; since thus they will have been directed to a supernatural end, and will earn for us an eternal reward, a never-fading crown in our heavenly country. To perform our daily actions in this manner, implies a continual exercise of charity; as thus they are done for the sake of God, and purely for His love. And further, by this means, the advantage of keeping God ever before us will be obtained without wearying the brain by

* Quemadmodum in apparando prandio, quoties calido potu opus est, si aqua parum calet, ad focum admotam recalefacimus: ita et hic faciendum est; et os nostrum ad precationes, quasi ad prunas admovendum, ut hoc pacto mens ad pietatem rursus accendatur.

forced reflections; inasmuch as the very intention of pleasing God in our actions kept up constantly, or at least renewed frequently, is of itself a loving remembrance of God, and therefore a true and very real act of His presence. St. Basil makes this plain by the comparison of a smith, or other artisan, who has been charged to produce a work belonging to his handicraft. The workman ever bears in mind the person who has given him the order, and executes it according to the plans and directions which he has received. Thus, continues the Saint, provided that in the performance of our outward actions we try to carry out the will of God, Who requires us to do them, and that we have in view, not our own private ends, but His good pleasure alone, not only will our works be perfect, but we shall thus be enabled ever to keep God before us, and to say in truth, with the Royal Prophet, *I have set the Lord always in my sight.**

300. A third method of easily realising the presence of God, is to arrange for ourselves a time and occasion of retirement during the course of the day, suitable to our duties and state of life. Religious enjoy in this respect a great advantage, as they are shut out from the turmoil and bustle of the world, and being free from the embarrassment of worldly ties and cares, they can withdraw to their cells, in which, though working with their hands, they can easily recollect themselves with God in heart. But seculars, especially women, are not wholly debarred from this practice: even they can find some place of retirement within their own homes, while they occupy themselves in their household duties; and if they will but provide and make use of such a retreat, it will be easy for them in the midst of their ordinary occupations to lift up their hearts to God, and to enter into

* Ut enim faber ferrarius verbi gratiâ; quandocumque dolabram aliquam, sive asciam cudit, si assidue illius memor sit, unde instrumentum illud faciendum ex pacto acceperit; et præscriptam ab illo sibi formam et magnitudinem animo versat, et ejus voluntatem qui condixit opus, dirigit quod facit . . . sic christianus, si actiones suas omnes, sive majores, sive minores, an Dei voluntatem direxerit; is sine controversiâ et egregie illud opus perficit, et simul assiduam in animo sibi memoriam conservat, a quo id jussus est facere; vere illud dicere poterit: *Providebam Dominum in conspectu meo semper; quoniam a dextris est mihi ne commovear.* In Regul. Fusius Explic. Quæst. 5.

mutual converse with Him; for, as He declares, then does He communicate Himself to our hearts when He sees that we are alone. *I will lead him into the wilderness*, or solitude, *and there*, as in a fitting place, *I will speak to his heart.** St. Eucherius relates† that a certain man, desirous of advancing in perfection, betook himself to a great servant of God and asked where he should be able to find God. At this question the holy man said "Come with me;" and he led him by the hand to a desert and solitary spot, where not a single human being was living. On arriving there he said, "This is the place where God may be found;" then turning homewards, he left the man in that solitude. So then, if any one would wish to converse with God during the day, he knows where God is to be looked for, and where He will most certainly be found.

301. But if our avocations compel us to remain in public, amid the hum of the busy world or in the company of the members of our own families, God will not fail to communicate Himself inwardly to us, if we on our part have any real wish to be with Him, and continue to seek Him in all our actions; and this, though they be performed in the presence of others: so long as we do them with an upright intention, and turn often to Him by ejaculations shot forth from our innermost heart. I have known a tradesman who stood behind his counter from morning till night, in a shop in which many sorts of goods were on sale, and which on that account was always crowded with persons coming to make purchase of different wares: and though the man was constantly engaged in selling, and very diligent in attending to the various wants of his customers, still he never lost the sweet calm and loving sense of God's presence. So true is it that our God can be found in the midst of the turmoil of business, by those who have not the means of seeking Him in the silence of solitude.

302. Metaphrastes relates that St. Gregory, Bishop of Agrigentum, when making a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, spent a whole Lent in a monastery of Palestine. He found much to

* Ducam eum in solitudinem, et loquar ad cor ejus. Osee. ij. 14.
† In Epist. ad S. Hilarium.

admire in the holy recluses; for in time of prayer, some were rapt in ecstasy; others were overwhelmed with a profusion of sweetly-flowing tears; others had the appearance of men who were quite worn out by the austerities of their penitential exercises, while some led so perfect a life, that they seemed to be angels in the flesh rather than men. So that the saintly Bishop found plenty of matter for self-condemnation, as in his humility he believed himself to be very unlike those with whom he was staying. The Abbot perceiving his trouble, and thinking that he was sorrowing on account of the distance which parted him from his friends and relatives, said to him, "Have patience, my son, and trust in God. You will soon go back to your native land." "Father," replied the Saint, "this is not the cause of the grief which you notice. The presence of God alone would suffice to make me happy in every place, to banish all sadness from my breast, and to fill me with unspeakable joy. But one thing only grieves me; that I find myself so much below these holy Religious in perfection." The Abbot then perceived that far from this Bishop needing comfort, he was able to impart consolation to others, since, by the exercise of the divine presence, he had attained to that entire peace of soul which is the summit of Christian perfection. Let this example, then, encourage us to make use of the simple and easy means which I have suggested of living in God's presence; for we have the same power of thus speedily advancing to a high state of perfection.

CHAPTER VI.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS TO DIRECTORS ON THE SUBJECT OF THE EXERCISE OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD.

303. FIRST suggestion. The Director must set great store upon the exercise of God's presence, and with all earnestness encourage such of his penitents as are anxious to make progress

to adopt it; for it is no less necessary than meditation, the importance of which, to those especially who aspire to perfection, can be seen in our fifth Article. Nay it is, in a certain sense, even more necessary, for meditation may, and at times must, be laid aside: as for instance, during periods of illness, or when we are overwhelmed with grave and pressing business which leaves no leisure for this salutary exercise. But the exercise of God's presence under the form of ejaculatory prayers, or of offering to God our crosses and sufferings, and frequently renewing the purity of our intention while actually engaged in business, should never be interrupted; but rather be more frequent and continuous in times of sickness or of absorbing care, so as to supply the loss of meditation, which in these cases is unavoidably omitted. Palladius relates* that having gone with one of his companions to a certain solitary, a great servant of God, Diocles by name, he received from him the following lesson amongst others: "A spiritual person who neglects the presence of God, will soon become either a demon or a brute. He will become a brute if, going astray from God he allow himself to gratify the animal cravings of his appetites. He will become a demon if he begin to give way to thoughts of vanity, presumption and arrogance; vices that characterise the proud spirits that have their abode in the depths of hell." The Director may gather from this, that to keep souls diligent in the practice of God's presence is nothing less than to lead them on to perfection itself.

304. So true is this, that the ancient Fathers laid—we may almost say—more stress on these frequent liftings up of the soul to God, than even on prolonged prayers; because, they said, the soul, by such fervent and frequently-repeated acts, unites itself the more closely with God, inasmuch as these ejaculations are not exposed to the distractions which commonly abound when prayer is lengthened out, nor are they beset with the temptations with which the devil usually assaults us during a long meditation. Cassian bears witness to this truth.† St. John Chrysostom takes the same

* In Hist. Lausiac. cap. 98.

† Utilius censent breves quidem orationes, sed creberrimas fieri: illud quidem, ut frequentius Dominum deprecantes jugiter eidem cohærere possimus·

view.* He speaks as if he preferred these short ejaculations (provided they be frequently made and at brief intervals) to long prayers, as they are not so liable to be marred by distractions, negligence, weariness, and the attacks of our insidious enemies, who, on beholding us in converse with God, delay not to ply their utmost endeavours. It is not to be inferred from this that we should leave off meditation, wherein the soul nourishes itself with holy considerations, at leisure and for a long time together, in the divine presence. The necessity of meditation is most manifest, as we have already shown. But the true inference to be drawn from what has been said above is, that the presence of God, continued during the day by frequent ejaculations, is not less necessary for perfection than mental prayer; and hence that Directors must be most careful in seeing that their penitents fail not to raise their thoughts and lift up their hearts to Almighty God during their daily occupations.

305. Second suggestion. The Director will need directions in choosing the way whereby to guide souls to practise the presence of God, and therefore must not require of them a continuance and intensity of acts so great as to overtask the powers of nature or of grace. He must see how they stand as to prayer, and must keep this in sight when he prescribes to them the degree in which they should exercise themselves in the presence of God. If a person have the gift of contemplation, the Confessor may require of him to abide constantly (morally speaking) in God's presence; for such souls, even out of times of prayer, have before them almost always that contemplative light which renders the exercise of God's presence easy and agreeable to them, so that they can continue it without any injury to their bodily health. Thus, we

hoc vero, ut insidiantis diaboli jacula, quæ infigere nobis tunc præcipue, cum oramus, insistit, succinctâ brevitate vitemus. Instit. Monast., lib. ij., cap. 10.

* Breves, sed frequentes orationes fieri, Christus et Paulus præceperunt parvis ex intervallis. Nam si sermonem in longum extenderis, in negligentiam frequenter lapsus, multum subrependi diabolo facultatem dederis et supplantandi, et cogitationem abducendi ab his, quæ dicuntur. Si vero continuas et crebras orationes facias, totumque tempus interpolans frequentiâ facile poteris molestiam cohibere, et ipsas orationes multâ facies solertiâ. Hom. De Fide Annæ.

are told of St. Bernard, in his life, that while at manual work he prayed continually without finding bodily toil any hindrance to him, so that his labour did not in any measure diminish the interior sweetness which he experienced.* But if a penitent have not the gift of prayer, but finds difficulties therein, especially if it be to him a time of dryness and desolation, he will surely be unable to bide uninterruptedly in the presence of God without so great a strain as to endanger his health and unfit him for every kind of devotional exercise. With persons of this class discretion must be observed in fixing the numbers of acts to be prescribed. The number must be large enough to rouse the torpid spirit from time to time, and make it yearn after God; but must not exceed this. As a general rule, however, no one should neglect to make a practice of offering to God, from time to time, the several outward works which he undertakes, with a sincere desire to comply with God's will and to be pleasing to Him; and even of pouring forth occasional ejaculations, especially cries for help: for this cannot prove of injury to any one, even if an invalid, and weighed down by most serious illness. And this seems to me to have been the meaning of St. John Chrysostom in one of his Homilies to the people of Antioch, when, inflamed with a holy zeal, he said, "Let no one tell me that a layman overwhelmed with the cares of business cannot pray continually. He can, and that easily. Know then, that wherever thou art, thou mayest raise an altar. Though thou bend not the knee nor stretch forth thy hand to heaven, if thou but lift up thy mind in fervent supplication, thou hast made a perfect prayer. Mind not the place: if thou be at the baths, pray; pray wherever thou mayest be. Thou thyself art the temple of God. God Himself continually dwells in thee. Pray then to Him in every place."† Now it is

* Laboris tempore et intus orabat absque intermissione exterioris laboris, et exterius laborabat sine jacturâ interioris suavitatis. Vita S. Bern., lib. i., cap. 4.

† Nec quisquam mihi dicat quod nequit homo secularis affixus foro, continue per diem orare. Potest enim et quam facillime. Ubicumque sis, potes altare tuum constituere. Licet genua non flectas, nec in cœlum manus extendas; si mentem tantum ferventem exhibeas, orationis perfectionem consummaveris. Licet in balneo sis, ora: ubicumque sis, ora. Templum es, ne locum quæras. Deus semper prope est. Homil. 79, Ad Populum Antiochen.

not likely that the Saint would have required shopkeepers, artisans, lawyers, and delicate women, to pray uninterruptedly from morning to night, with sustained fervour and minds ever fixed on God; for this is not to be expected from the mass of the imperfect, absorbed as they are in so many and most distracting occupations. The holy preacher then must have meant what has been said above; namely, that amid their toils and pleasures, all should lift up their minds to God, by some devout act especially of petition; that all should constantly direct to God their intention in everything that they do; this being a very true mode of prayer and a very real act of the presence of God, suitable to each and every one, whatever his state of life or disposition of soul. The Director, however, must bear in mind the caution given in the fourth Chapter as to the danger of persons of weak imagination, women especially, cultivating the presence of God by the fancy; both because the imagination may receive thereby permanent injury, and because the persons themselves may become dreamers and visionaries by being too much occupied with sensible representations.

306. Third suggestion. Should the penitent be liable to distractions and thus easily lose the sense of God's presence, the Director will employ divers means for bringing back to his mind this divine presence, which is so advantageous to all. He may prescribe to the penitent to lift up his mind to God by some aspiration or petition every time that the clock chimes the quarters; never to begin any work without first offering it up to God with a sincere purpose of doing it to please Him; to keep in the places in which he usually transacts business some representation of the Crucified Saviour, or of the Blessed Virgin, which, by meeting his eyes, may stir up within him the remembrance of God. We are told by Surius that St. Edmund, Archbishop of Canterbury, made use of this expedient. He had the habit of carrying about on his person a small ivory figure, on which were engraven the several mysteries of our Saviour's Life and Passion, in order to keep the memory thereof fresh amidst his multifarious occupations. And God Himself employed the like means to maintain among the Israelites a lively

* In Vitâ S. Edmundi.

remembrance of Himself and His commandments. He bade Moses speak to the children of Israel, ordering them to make fringes in the borders of their garments, and to put on the fringe of the border a ribbon of a blue colour, so that they might be reminded of His commandments as often as it met their eyes.* Expedients of this nature are unquestionably most excellent, since they have been prescribed by the Director of Directors, even by God Himself.

307. Fourth suggestion. If, however, the Director fail to obtain of his penitent some kind of turning of the heart to God during the ordinary occupations of the day, it is a clear and unmistakable sign that no spark of divine love is as yet enkindled within the soul, nor any desire of spiritual advancement: for if we really love, we must perforce think often of the object beloved; and when we desire some end, we naturally make use of the means which help to its attainment. What will not merchants do to compass the gains they so earnestly desire? They think of nothing else in their waking moments, and the same thought haunts their very dreams. See the student and the man of letters engaged in their earnest pursuit of knowledge. They imprison themselves in a narrow chamber and waste the flower of their youth over their books, and by excessive study often shorten their lives. Further, this will be an unmistakable sign that such a one seeks himself only in what he does—his own caprices, his own aims, his own interests, his own good name; and so is unable to lift up his mind to God, being borne down and blinded by the mire of these earthly desires. In a case like this, nothing is left but to awaken in the person a love of God and an earnest desire of perfection, by inducing him to practise the methods we have heretofore explained, and those also which we shall explain in the sequel of the present Section.

* Loquere filiis Israel, et dices ad eos, ut faciant sibi fimbrias per angulos palliorum, ponentes in eis vittas hyacinthinas; quas cum viderint, recordentur omnium mandatorum Domini. Num. xv. 38, 39.

ARTICLE VIII.

Seventh means for attaining to Christian Perfection. Sacramental Confession made frequently and with due dispositions.

CHAPTER I.

THAT SACRAMENTAL CONFESSION MADE FREQUENTLY IS A MOST EFFECTUAL MEANS OF SPEEDILY ATTAINING TO PERFECTION.

308. BLOSIUS has left on record that our Blessed Saviour said one day to St. Bridget, that to acquire His spirit and preserve the same when acquired, she should often confess her sins, omissions and imperfections, to some lawfully-approved Priest.* To acquire this spirit of Christ is one and the same thing as to acquire Christian perfection. The two expressions mean one and the same thing. For Christian perfection, considered either in itself (essential perfection) or as a means (instrumental perfection) consists exclusively in the imitation of our Saviour's life and in acquiring His spirit. For we cannot doubt but that being God from everlasting and immortal, He became man and mortal to teach by His own example what is the most perfect life we mortals can lead. It clearly follows then, that frequent Confession, being an effectual means of acquiring the spirit of Christ, as He Himself has said, it is at the same time an effectual means of attaining to Christian perfection.

309. We have then, nothing to do but to develop the grounds of this assertion, so that it may take a firmer hold on the minds of our readers, and enhance their esteem for a practice on which their progress in spirit so greatly depends. Cassian, speaking of purity of conscience—not merely of the virtue which is

* Et qui spiritum, et gratiam meam adipisci, et retinere desiderat, utile est, crebro peccata et negligentias suas coram sacerdote confiteri, ut expurgentur. Monil. Spir., cap. 5.

tarnished by lust, but of that general purity which is incompatible with all transgression and all that may defile the soul—Cassian, I say, speaking of purity of conscience in this wider sense, says that we should aspire to it with all earnestness; that it should be the end of all our endeavours and of all we have to bear with when travelling on the path of perfection; in a word, that this is the virtue for the sake of which we have left country, kindred, station, wealth, all the pleasures of the world, and have offered to God the unreserved sacrifice of our will.* He alleges as the reason of the primary importance of this unblemished purity, that it is the last step we have to take before we enter into the furnace of divine love, which is the essence of our perfection.† God bestows the gift of consummate charity in Heaven, on those souls alone who have been purified, like gold in the crucible, by the pains of purgatory, and who purged of their imperfections have attained to an unblemished purity. For the same reason He will withhold, in this life, the gift of perfect charity from all save from those who are free from stain and who have become spotless and pure in His sight. Now, the greater this purity, the more unalloyed is the gift of charity which He deigns to impart to us. This is precisely the reason why frequent Confession is so effectual a means of speedily attaining to perfection; since, of its very nature, it helps us to acquire that cleanness of heart which is the crowning disposition for receiving the gift of divine love.

310. But, for the better understanding of this doctrine, we will now show wherein consists the cleanness of heart to which we who live amid the defilements of this miserable world may hope to attain, with the help of God. It consists not, as some have falsely imagined, in an entire freedom from all sin and all imperfection whatsoever; for, since the time of Christ and His ever-

* Quidquid ergo ad hunc scopum, idest puritatem cordis, potest dirigere, totâ virtute sectandum est: quidquid autem ab hâc retrahit, ut periculosum, et noxium devitandum. Pro hâc enim universa toleramus et agimus; pro hâc parentes, et patria, dignitates, divitiæ, deliciæ hujus mundi, et voluptas universa contemnitur; ut scilicet puritas cordis perpetua retineatur. Coll. i., cap. 5.

† Ut scilicet per has ab universis passionibus noxiis illæsum parare cor nostrum, et conservare possimus; et ad perfectionem caritatis istis gradibus inniteudo conscendere. Ibid., cap. 7.

Virgin Mother, no ermine has been seen in this polluted world so spotless as not to have contracted some stain. For, as St. James says, *In many things we all offend;** and St. Thomas Aquinas, discoursing on this very point, asserts, that we can avoid each particular venial sin, but not all in general.† And St. Leo the Great, when making special mention of persons wholly devoted to God's service, says, that owing to the frailty of our nature, not even such as these are free from the dust of trivial transgressions.‡ Since then, cleanness of heart cannot mean an entire freedom from sin, it must imply two things :—First, an exact custody of our hearts and a strict watchfulness over our outward actions, in order to avoid, as far as may be, the committing a single fault. And the stricter the watch which a person keeps over his actions, and the more successful he is in diminishing the number of his failings, the more unblemished will be his purity. Secondly, since in spite of all the caution we can take, we shall be ever contracting some slight defilement of soul, it will be necessary to be assiduously careful in cleansing our hearts from the impurities which accumulate through the more trivial faults into which we so frequently fall. The cleanliness of a fine hall or splendid chamber does not imply that no grain of dust shall ever fall upon the floor, walls, paintings and furniture. Such cleanliness as this may not be looked for even in royal residences and in the private chambers of kings. It supposes only that the palace and its precincts be kept free from all accumulations of dirt, that all be often swept and dusted, and that everything opposed to cleanliness be removed. A lady, however particular on the point of cleanliness, does not require that her garments should preserve their first whiteness, for she knows that is impossible ; but she is careful to keep them from all stain, and to have them frequently washed and cleansed from such stains as they may have contracted. The same holds good o

* In multis offendimus omnes. Jac. iij. 2.

† Dicendum, quod homo in gratiâ constitutus, potest vitare omnia peccata mortalia et singula; potest etiam vitare singula peccata venialia; sed non omnia. 3 p., q. 28, al. 86, a. 1, ad 1.

‡ Dum carnis fragilitate austerior observantia relaxatur, dumque per varias actiones vitæ hujus solicitudo distenditur, necesse est de humano pulvere etiam religiosa corda sordescere. Serm. 4. De Quadr.

purity of heart, which cannot, of course, consist in entire freedom from faults of every kind, but in carefully watching over self, in guarding against any defilement, and in frequently purifying the conscience.

311. Now these are precisely the two effects which frequent Confession produces in the soul. Hence we attain by this, more speedily than by any other means, to that purity of soul which is the crowning disposition for receiving divine love. No detergent in the world can cleanse our soiled garments so completely as Sacramental Confession can purify our souls from every stain. Suffice it to say, that in this Sacrament the soul is all plunged into a bath of Christ's Blood, which has a boundless efficacy for removing its every stain, for taking from it all that makes it hideous, and for rendering it whiter than the lily, purer than the driven snow. This is what the Apostle St. John assures us of, when he says, *If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just, to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all iniquity.**

312. This truth of the Catholic faith is wondrously illustrated by what may be read in the fourth step of the well-known "Ladder of Perfection," by St. John Climacus. A most abandoned youth, having been awakened by the voice of God speaking loudly to his heart, went to one of the monasteries most famous for the holiness of its inmates, and, falling at the feet of the Superior, asked him for the religious habit. The Abbot, hearing from the youth how disorderly a life he had led, asked him whether he would have the courage to make his General Confession in presence of the whole Community. The young man, penetrated with compunction, replied that he was ready to make his Confession, if necessary, in presence of all the inhabitants of the city of Alexandria. The following Sunday, when the monks, to the number of two hundred and thirty, were gathered together in the Church, the Abbot brought in the young man, with ashes sprinkled on his head, clad in sackcloth, with his hands tied behind his back, and surrounded by some of the brethren, who were scourging him as severely as his weakness allowed. At

* Si confiteamur peccata nostra, fidelis est (Deus) et justus, ut remittat nobis peccata nostra, et emundet nos ab omni iniquitate. 1 Jo. i. 9.

this, so moving a sight, there arose throughout the entire assembly of the Religious a devout murmur and a cry of compassion. But when the young man, prostrate in the middle of the Church, began, with a flood of tears, to make public confession of all his enormities, to unfold the tale of his disorders, distinguishing both their number and kind; when he proceeded to accuse himself of all the murders he had committed, of his many robberies, and repeated sacrileges;—the monks were thunder-stricken, partly on account of the horror such unheard-of misdeeds inspired, partly through being wondrously edified at the sight of a penitence so rarely witnessed. Meanwhile a holy monk saw some one, of majestic and awful appearance, standing with a large scroll and a bottle of ink in one hand, and in the other hand a pen. He observed, too, that as each sin was confessed, the man crossed it out with his pen; so that when the confession was ended all the sins were cancelled from the paper and the soul of the penitent alike. Now, what was thus visibly shown in the case of that repentant youth, happens to us in an invisible manner whenever we confess any sin, failing, or imperfection; for all are blotted out at once from the book in which our life is written by God, and from the book of our soul which then regains its former unsullied purity. And hence to attain to cleanness of heart, so far as this implies a constant care to remove the stains we may have contracted, no better or more effectual means exists than the frequent practice of Confession. This truth must be plain to every one.

313. But further, there is no better means than Confession for rendering the soul careful and watchful lest it relapse into its former failings. The great Apostle teaches that the supernatural sorrow, which is from above, works lasting fruits of salvation, and hence of perfection also.* Now, this comes to the same as saying that penance, when duly performed, produces a lasting amendment. Various reasons can be given for this. In the first place, the very disowning our faults, and the good purposes of serious amendment which accompany a well-made Confession, detach the soul from all affection for its past sins, and render it careful

* Quæ enim secundum Deum tristitia est, pœnitentiam in salutem stabilem operatur. 2 Cor. vij. 10.

not to fall into them any more. Then again, the special grace bestowed in this Sacrament strengthens the will in its conflict with our disordered inclinations and the deceitful suggestions of our hellish foes. So that we may well say with St. Thomas Aquinas, that penance is a virtue whose special effect is to uproot sin; to such an extent, at least, that as far as in us lies, sin shall never again grow rank within our hearts.* In the third place, the Confessor himself, to whom we disclose our faults, understanding our state, is better able to help us to get rid of them, by suggesting appropriate means and remedies, which may be of the greatest use in bringing about our amendment. So that, frequent recourse to this Sacrament not only cleanses us from past failings, but makes us more watchful and careful not to commit them again. And Confession, in this manner, helps us to acquire great purity of conscience; which, as we have said, is most closely connected with the gift of perfect charity.

314. St. Bernard, in his history of St. Malachy, relates, that there was a woman so subject to fits of anger, rage, and fury, that she seemed herself like a fury from the bottomless pit sent to torment every one who came into contact with her. Wherever she stayed her venomous tongue stirred up hatred and quarrelling, brawls and strife; so that she became unbearable, not only to her own kindred and more immediate neighbours, but even to her very children, who, unable to live with her, had purposed to leave her and to go elsewhere. But, as a last endeavour, they took her to the holy Bishop Malachy, to see whether he would be able to tame the ungovernable temper of their mother. St. Malachy confined himself to the inquiry whether she had ever confessed all her outbursts of passion, her many outrageous words, and the numberless brawls she had provoked with her unruly tongue. She replied that she had not. "Well then," continued he, "confess them now to me." She did so, and after her Confession he gave her some loving counsel, pointing out suitable remedies; and, having imposed a penance, absolved her from her sins. After this Confession the woman, to the astonishment of all who

* In pœnitentiâ invenitur specialiter ratio actûs laudabilis; scilicet operari ad destructionem peccati præteriti. 3 part., q. 25, alias 85, a. 2, in corp.

knew her, appeared changed from the fierce lioness she had been, into a meek lamb. St. Bernard concludes his narration by the following words:—"It is said that the woman is still living, and that she, whose tongue had up to that time outraged and exasperated everybody, now seems to be unable to resent the injuries, the insults, the mishaps which daily fell to her lot."* Behold, then, how a Confession, made with the fitting dispositions, has power to cleanse the soul from past defilement and to preserve it from falling again; and, partly by remedying the past, partly by providing for the future, brings the devout person to perfect stainlessness of conscience. We ought, therefore, to conceive a high esteem of this Sacrament if we care to make any progress in perfection, and should remember that, as bodily medicine, if very sparingly used, gives relief, it is true, while, if frequently applied, it mostly restores health; thus too Confession, if made even but seldom, produces saving effects in the soul, while, if made frequently, it begets in it the fulness of perfection.

CHAPTER II.

CONDITIONS REQUIRED FOR SACRAMENTAL CONFESSION IN ORDER THAT IT MAY PRODUCE THAT CLEANNESS OF HEART WHICH IS THE PROXIMATE DISPOSITION TO PERFECTION. EXPLANATION OF THE FIRST CONDITION.

315. It will be seen that in the present Article we are not speaking of those requisites of Sacramental Confession without which it would be invalid, and would fail to impart sanctifying grace. We are considering Confession inasmuch as it is an efficacious means for attaining perfection, by imparting great purity of soul to such as make frequent use thereof. Hence it is necessary

* Fertur adhuc hodie vivere, et tantæ esse patientiæ et lenitatis, ut quæ omnes exasperare solebat, nullis modis exasperari damnis, contumeliis, afflictionibus queat. S. Bern., in Vitâ S. Malach.

that we should set forth the conditions needed by this Sacrament, not only in order to its valid reception, but as a means of enabling devout persons to attain to purity of conscience. The first condition (to the explanation of which we will confine ourselves in this Chapter) is well known, not only to the more devout, but even to the carnal minded, and to quite young children: and it is that Confession must be accompanied with sorrow. But since this is a truth which is as seldom acted upon as it is generally known—sometimes too even by those who make profession of devotion and piety—it will not be superfluous to call to it the attention of the reader.

316. It is well known by all, that a heartfelt and supernatural sorrow is an indispensable preliminary to Confession. By supernatural sorrow we mean a sorrow inspired by motives which are superior to nature. The reason of which is that God never has pardoned, and by an unchangeable decree has bound Himself never to pardon any one, unless the person first repent of his misdeeds for motives of this character. Suffice it to observe, that Baptism itself, which is endowed with efficacy to impart a new life to souls which are not only dead, but which have become corrupt in every vice, requires (as St. Thomas teaches) for a previous disposing of the soul to its reception, some sorrow for sins committed. Hence it has been said by St. Ambrose, "that repentance is as needful for him that confesses, as the surgeon's art is for a wounded man."* And he infers that "since after Baptism we have no other remedy left us for our sins but repentance, as all are convinced, we should strive after it with all our might, whatever it may cost us of trouble and painstaking."†

317. Yet Directors will not seldom fall in with spiritual persons, who appear to think that the whole efficacy of this Sacrament depends on lengthy details, and in saying in many words what could be all said in very few. Besides the want of reverence, of which

* Pœnitudo necessaria est, sicut vulnerato sunt necessaria medicamenta.

† Cum hæc certâ fide, sicut est, animo conceperis, quia necesse est prævaricatricem animam tartareis pœnis et gehennæ ignibus tradi, nec aliud remedium constitutum esse post baptismum, quam pœnitentiæ solatium; quantamvis afflictionem, quantumvis laborem et indecorum subire esto contenta, dummodo ab infernalibus pœnis libereris. Ad Virg. Lapsam, cap. 7.

such as these are guilty, by speaking useless words in Confession—in which, according to St. Thomas, we should confine ourselves to explaining the number and species of our sins*—they further show that they are ignorant of what Confession is; for, as St. Gregory states most positively, "the sign of a good, valid and fruitful Confession is not the multitude of words spoken by the tongue, but the sorrow that comes from the heart; and him alone may we judge to be converted and to have made a good Confession, who strives to blot out by heartfelt sorrow those sins of which his tongue makes the outward avowal."† And commenting on the warning of St. John the Baptist, *Bring forth fruits worthy of penance,*‡ the same holy Doctor observes, that in Confession words are but as shoots and leaves, but that the fruit consists in sorrow of the soul; that the verbal confession of sin is to be valued only inasmuch as it is the expression of a true and heartfelt repentance. He further adds, that as our Blessed Lord cursed the barren fig-tree, which, though having much load of branches and leaves, yet bore no fruit, so does He likewise reject and abhor such Confessions as abound in the foliage, so to speak, of unnecessary words, but are barren of the fruit of efficacious contrition.§ Sorrow, and great sorrow, is what is needed, not long explanations and needless details, if Confession is to restore the sinner to grace, and if devout persons (to whom we are now expressly addressing ourselves) are to acquire by its means that purity of heart

* Non recitet (scilicet pœnitens) in confessione, nisi quod ad quantitatem peccati pertinet. Suppl. 3 part., q. 9, art. 4, in corp.

† Signum veræ confessionis non est in oris confessione, sed in afflictione pœnitentiæ. Tunc namque bene conversum peccatorem cernimus, cum dignâ afflictionis austeritate delere nititur, quod loquendo confitetur. Lib. vj. in 1 Regum, cap. 15.

‡ Facite ergo fructum dignum pœnitentiæ. Matth. viij. 8.

§ Unde Joannes Baptista male conversos Judæos ad se confluentes increpans ait: *Genimina viperarum, quis ostendit vobis fugere a venturâ irâ? Facite ergo fructus dignos pœnitentiæ.* In fructu ergo, non in foliis aut ramis pœnitentia cognoscenda est; quasi arbor quippe bona voluntas est. Confessionis ergo verba quid sunt aliud, nisi folia? Non ergo nobis folia propter se ipsa, sed propter fructum expetenda sunt: quia idcirco omnis confessio peccatorum recipitur, ut fructus pœnitentiæ subsequatur. Unde et Dominus arborem foliis decoram, fructu sterilem maledixit, quia confessionis ornamentum non recipit sine fructu afflictionis.

which is so necessary for the attainment of Christian perfection.

318. The truth of what I say is confirmed by the following incident. Cesarius relates,* "that a young student at Paris, having fallen into many very serious sins, betook himself to the monastery of St. Victor, and, calling the Prior, fell at his feet in order to accuse himself of them. Scarce had he begun to open his lips, when his contrition became so vehement, that his utterance was checked, and his Confession hindered by his tears, groans, and convulsive sobs. The Confessor, seeing that the youth was unable, from excessive grief, to say another word, bade him write down his sins on a sheet of paper, and come back again when he had done so; hoping that, by this means, the young man would find it easier to make a Confession of all his crimes. He complied, and returned to the same Priest, but no sooner did he begin to read from his paper, than overcome anew with sorrow and tears, he was unable to proceed. The Confessor then asked him for the paper, and as in reading it, a doubt arose in his mind on some point, he begged the penitent's leave to show his Confession to the Abbot, in order to get his opinion. The contrite youth willingly consented, and forthwith the Prior, bearing the paper with him, went to look for the Abbot, and put it into his hands. The latter on opening it, found nothing but a blank sheet, without so much as a single stroke of the pen upon the page. 'How now,' he said, 'do you want me to read what is not written?' 'But,' replied the Prior, 'I have this moment read on that very paper the full Confession of this my penitent.' Then both began to examine the paper afresh, and found that the sins had been blotted out of it, even as they were already blotted out of the conscience of the sorrowing youth." We may observe, that this young student had not yet made his Confession, and still had already received a full pardon; for though he had said nothing with his tongue, he had spoken much with his heart. To use the expression of St. Gregory the Great, he had not as yet put forth leaves, but as he detested his misdeeds from his heart, he had already gathered in the fruit of pardon, and nothing now remained for him

* Histor., lib. v. Mirac., cap. 10.

to do, save to fulfil the obligation of subjecting them to the sacramental absolution. Those who in their Confessions are so taken up with what they have to tell that they scarcely attend to the solid fruit of repentance, may hereby learn a useful lesson.

319. It must further be borne in mind that this repentance must be effectual, if it is to produce in the soul that purity which Confession is calculated to impart. Effectual or efficacious repentance is that which is accompanied by a serious and firm resolve not to fall again into the same faults; for, as Lactantius has it, "To do penance is simply and solely to protest our resolution of sinning no more."* And St. Gregory, combining with greater accuracy the two essentials of true repentance, says: "That to repent is neither more nor less than to grieve over the evil we have done, and not to do again the evil that we grieve over. Forasmuch as he that mourns over his sins, yet continues to commit them, either knows not what repentance really is, or else acts as if he did not know."† These pithy and practical sayings may well furnish grave matter of doubt to certain pious people, who come again and again to Confession with the self-same sins, although these may not, perhaps, be wholly voluntary. Such persons should consider that if their sorrow were as efficacious as it should be, it would naturally have a strong tendency to diminish the future number of these faults; it would strengthen and steady their wills; and it would (at least in course of time) bear witness to itself by a certain amendment, so as to bring them at length to the unblemished purity after which they should aspire by means of this great Sacrament. It has been well said by St. Ambrose: "in order that our past sins be not imputed to us, and that we be considered as innocent of them, sorrow and tears are not enough; amendment also must be required."‡

* Agere pœnitentiam nihil aliud est, quam profiteri et affirmare, se ulterius non peccaturum. Instit., cap. 15.

† Pœnitentiam agere, est, perpetrata mala plangere, et plangenda non perpetrare: nam qui sic alia deplorat, ut tamen alia committat, adhuc pœnitentiam agere aut dissimulat, aut ignorat. Homil 34, in Evang.

‡ Qui agit pœnitentiam, non solum diluere lacrymis debet peccatum suum; sed etiam emendationibus factis operire et tegere delicata superiora, ut ei non imputetur peccatum. De Pœnit. lib. ij.

320. The same Cesarius relates an awful occurrence which took place at Paris shortly before he published the narration in his writings.* There was in this great metropolis a Canon of the Church of Notre-Dame, who was a Priest in name, it is true, but certainly not in the practice of the virtues becoming his holy state. This Canon being at the point of death, entered into himself, acknowledged the wretched state of his soul, and seemed to be a really penitent and wholly changed man. Having summoned his Confessor, he accused himself, with abundant tears, of all his sins, and received the Holy Viaticum and Extreme Unction with every outward token of piety. He then gently breathed out his soul in peace. After his decease, a magnificent burial service was prepared, and the day appointed for it was so fine, that it looked as if heaven and earth were leagued together in order to enhance the pomp of the funeral obsequies. Every one deemed him the happiest man that had ever appeared on the face of the earth, since, after having enjoyed this world to the full, he had secured for himself the glory of Paradise by so happy a death. Such was the common talk; for man sees what is outside, but God beholds what lies hid within.† In a few days time the unhappy Canon appeared to a servant of God, and brought him the sad news that he was damned. "But how so?" asked the holy man, quite astounded; "you confessed with sorrow and tears, and received the holy Sacraments with devotion!" "True," said the lost soul, "I did confess, and I was sorry, yet not with an efficacious sorrow, since my will, in the very act of repenting, felt itself spurred on to sin afresh; and I thought it quite impossible that, if restored to health, I should not return to that which I so dearly loved. So that, while I detested the evil I had committed, I had no earnest and firm purpose of renouncing it." Having said this, he disappeared. It is not our intention to carry dismay into the minds of our readers by recording this event, for as we suppose them to be devout and spiritual persons, they doubtless lead lives free from

* Lib. ii., Mirac., cap. 15.

† Homo videt ea, quæ parent; Dominus autem intuetur cor. 1 Reg., xvi. 7.

mortal sin, and are far removed from all danger of losing their souls through bad Confessions. We would only remind them that their frequent confession of slight faults, unless accompanied with an efficacious repentance, joined to a firm and earnest purpose of amendment, will not avail to cleanse their souls of these stains, nor produce reform of life; nor will it help them to acquire that purity of conscience which is so necessary for such as would make progress in Christian perfection. St. Augustine is most explicit on this point. He says that without true repentance, there never can be a real change of life, whether the sins we commit be great or small.*

CHAPTER III.

SECOND AND THIRD CONDITIONS REQUIRED FOR CONFESSION, THAT IT MAY BRING TO THE SOUL THE DESIRED DEGREE OF PURITY.

321. In order that the repentance of which we are speaking may avail to cleanse the soul thoroughly of all its stains, it must be accompanied by a sincere humility; for God will never despise a contrite heart, when He sees that it is humbled.† Hence St. Thomas teaches that Confession should be humble, as it should ever result in a sense of self-abasement at the sight of our faults, making us own that we are full of weakness, infirmity, and wretchedness.‡ Let the penitent consider the confession of the Publican, and in it he will find an exact model of the humility and lowliness of mind required by this Sacrament. The Publican looked upon himself as one of the greatest sinners in the world.§ He durst not

* Nec quemquam putes ab errore ad veritatem, vel a quocumque suo magno, vel parvo peccato, ad correctionem, sine pœnitentiâ posse transire. Ep. ad Vincentium. In fine.

† Cor contritum et humiliatum Deus non despicies. Psal. l. 19.

‡ In abjectione sui terminatur (scilicet confessio); et quantum ad hoc debet esse humilis, ut se miserum confiteatur et infirmum. Sup. 3 part. q. 9. art. 4.

§ Domine, propitius esto mihi peccatori. Luc. xviij. 13.

so much as lift up his eyes to heaven, but held them downcast, and, with shame on his countenance, fixed them on the ground. He smote his breast, and thus moved God to compassion, appeased His wrath and obtained His pardon. Such are the sentiments wherewith we should approach the holy tribunal of penance; for, as St. Augustine says, the inward shame which we feel at the sight of our offences has a large share in obtaining our pardon; and it is out of mercy to us that God has decreed, that in order to obtain forgiveness, it should not be enough to repent in secret, and be seen by Him alone; but that we must express our sorrow at the feet of the Priest, and thus be covered with that most wholesome confusion, which is of so great avail to obtain pardon for our sins.*

322. St. John Chrysostom observes that this inward humility springs naturally, as it were, from Confession, if only it be duly made.† The reason of this is plain; as, in confessing our sins in a fitting manner, we acknowledge before God the evil we have done in sinning, the greatness of the God whom we have offended, and our own vileness and audacity in daring to insult a God of so great majesty. Hence the soul, like a criminal in the presence of an offended Sovereign, humbles itself before the Lord, owns its abjection, is filled with confusion, and, detesting its misdeeds, implores forgiveness. The soul thus humbled before God, presents so touching an object in His sight, that instantly He is roused to compassionate pity, forgives the transgressions of the culprit, and hastens in all tenderness to clasp him lovingly to His bosom, to treat him not as a criminal, nor as one who has ever been guilty, but as a darling child.‡ With such humble contrition, with sorrowing confusion, then, should the spiritual man draw nigh to the laver of Confession; and he should rest

* Qui per vos peccastis, per vos erubescatis. Erubescentia enim ipsa partem habet remissionis. Ex misericordiâ enim hoc præcepit Dominus ut neminem pœniteret in occulto: in hoc enim, quod per seipsum dicit sacerdoti, et erubescentiam vincit timore offensi, fit venia criminis. De Verâ et Falsâ Pœnit., cap. 10.

† Si confessus fueris peccatum tuum, sicut oportet confiteri, humiliatur anima. Hom. 9 in Ep. ad Hebr.

‡ Cor contritum et humiliatum, Deus, non despicies. Psal. l. 19.

assured that our Redeemer, beholding us to be in these good dispositions, will shower down His precious blood in such abundance, as to cleanse us from all stain, and render us whiter and purer than the lily or the hyacinth.

323. But here let us observe that the humility, which should ever accompany sorrow for sin, is not a false humility: this, far from obtaining, would only hinder, the pardon of our sins. Now, humility is false, whenever it is not joined with a strong and firm hope of obtaining forgiveness. But to avoid all mistake, let us proceed with method. There are, then, two sorts of humility; one is the gift of the bountiful hands of God, the other comes from the crafty hands of the devil. The humility which is God's gift brings with it, indeed, a knowledge of our sins and miseries, but has this property, that while it lowers the soul in its own estimation, it raises it to hope, and finally leaves it in great calm, and reposing within the arms of the Divine Goodness. The humility, however, which is counterfeit and from the devil, brings with it, in like manner, a knowledge of our own sins and weakness; but it has this most injurious quality, that while it bends low the soul, it takes away hope, or at least diminishes it, and leaves us full of cowardice, diffidence and discouragement. The humility which is God's gift, is holy. That which comes from the devil, is wicked. The former disposes us for pardon; the latter prevents forgiveness. Hence a third condition which our Confessions should have is that they be made in a spirit of faith and hope: they should be accompanied with a sorrow not only humble, but full of faith and trust in God. "Let thy Confessions," says St. Bernard, "be faithful, that so thou mayest confess in hope without any distrust of forgiveness."* Without such hope we should never obtain pardon, were we to seek it for all eternity; because sorrow for sin unaccompanied by hope of forgiveness, so far from appeasing, only irritates Divine mercy. Cain repented him of his crime after he had murdered his own brother, but because he did not trust in the Divine Goodness, his sorrow availed him not: *My iniquity*,

* Sit autem et fidelis confessio, ut confitearis in spe, de indulgentiâ penitus non diffidens. Serm. 16 in Cantic.

he said in his folly, *is greater than may deserve pardon.** Judas Iscariot, in like manner, repented, and exclaimed, with the tears flowing down his cheeks, *I have sinned in betraying innocent blood.*† And further, he made restitution of the money for which he had bartered away the precious life of his Divine Master. But what did all this profit him? Nothing whatever. His sorrow was devoid of any gleam of hope; and giving himself up for lost, he went and hanged himself on a tree.

324. Of such a nature is the repentance of certain devout persons, who, after falling into some serious fault, or seeing that they relapse constantly into the same sins, are filled with bitterness, distrust, and false humility, and say to themselves, "God will not pardon me; I think He has turned His back upon me, for my wickedness is beyond endurance, and I am continually yielding to the same faults." This is the contrition of Judas and of Cain, devoid of all trust in God's goodness.‡

325. The devil appeared once to Faverius, a disciple of St. Bruno, and monk of singular goodness, who was lying dangerously ill on his sick-bed, and, after terrifying him in other ways, began to remind him of his sins, and to throw them in his face with impudent assurance. The Servant of God replied that he had already confessed these sins and received absolution, and therefore had every cause to trust that God had pardoned him. "Confessed your sins! Confessed your sins!" replied the fiend. "You have not told all; you have not made a proper Confession; you have not explained the circumstances of your sins. Your Confessions are all invalid; they are good for nothing; they will serve only to make your judgment the heavier." The holy monk, thus reminded of faults shown to him by the fiend in that accursed light which makes us see things in a false medium, and which represents God as always using fire and the knife in His treatment of sick souls, was greatly alarmed and began to be tortured with the most agonising scruples; being so horror-stricken and full of dismay that he was on the point of falling headlong

* Major est iniquitas mea, quam ut veniam merear. Gen. iv. 13.
† Peccavi, tradens sanguinem justum. Matth. xvij. 4.
‡ Major est iniquitas mea, quam ut veniam merear. Gen. iv. 13.

into the abyss of despair. But the Blessed Virgin, ever the true Mother of Mercy, who forsakes not such as are really devoted to her, appeared to him most opportunely at this terrible moment, with her Divine Infant in her arms, and addressed him as follows: "What fearest thou, Faverius? wherefore lose heart? Hope, and be of good cheer; thou hast all but reached the port. All thy sins have been forgiven thee by my most winning Child. Of this I give thee my assurance."* At these words the racking and craven anguish felt by the dying man at the thought of his sins, gave place to a humble, confiding, peaceful sorrow; and shortly after he breathed his last in great calm of soul. The reader may hence perceive the difference there is between contrition which is God's gift, and that which comes from the devil. This latter is a sorrow full of diffidence and disquiet, the former is a trusting and peaceful repentance. Let all, then, ever strive after it, and take care to possess it whenever they go to Confession; it alone appeases God, obtains pardon for sin, and leads the soul to perfect purity.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FOURTH AND FIFTH CONDITIONS REQUIRED IN ORDER THAT CONFESSION MAY LEAD TO PERFECTION THROUGH EXQUISITE PURITY OF SOUL.

326. BESIDES the conditions we have just explained, in order that Confession may produce in the soul the purity we have already mentioned and dispose it to perfection, it must further be entire and simple. Integrity of Confession requires, says the Angelic Doctor, that no sin be omitted with advertence.† If the sin be mortal, such integrity is necessary for eternal salvation; for any deadly sin purposely omitted will never be blotted out of the

* Quid times, animumque despondes? in portu navigas. Omnia tibi ab hoc pulcherrimo puero peccata condonantur, tibique esse remissa confirmo. Ex Annal. Carthus.—Henr. Granius, In Prato Exemp.

† Ut non subtrahatur aliquid de his, quæ manifestanda sunt: et contra hoc dicitur integra. Ut supra.

soul. If the sin be venial it is necessary to confess it, if we would make that true and rapid advance in perfection of which we are at present speaking. Should a dastardly fear and a misplaced shame withhold any one from making known to his Confessor a single mortal sin, he will, on this account alone, remain under God's displeasure and in danger of eternal perdition. If these same feelings keep a devout soul from manifesting to the Priest some venial fault, or particular imperfection, they will be the cause of slow progress, and of remissness in the path of the perfect life. Hence, devout persons must aim, in their Confessions, not only at such integrity as is of precept and essential to salvation, but also at that which is of mere counsel and regards perfection; if, that is, they be truly desirous of making real progress in the spiritual life.

327. St. Augustine, treating of Confession, says: "How shall the physician heal a sore if the patient refuse to show it?* And how can your Confessor, who is your soul's physician, heal you of the sins which you are continually committing, unless you discover them to him? How can he free you from those passions to which you are subject, if you hide them from him? how defend you from the temptations with which the devil assails you, and urges you forward to the precipice down which he strives to cast you, if you will not lay them bare before him?" "What weakness is this," says the same Saint in another place, "to be ashamed to tell what you are not ashamed to do?† Is it not far better to suffer now, in the presence of one man only, some slight confusion, which will save you from the overwhelming shame that will fall to your lot, when, in the day of judgment, so many myriads and myriads will be made to know all your sinfulness?"‡ "The more so," adds the Saint, "since, by now concealing your faults through a misplaced shame, and by omitting to confess them even for the sake of saving your soul, you will one day have for

* Quomodo potest medicus sanare vulnus, quod ægrotus ostendere nequit? Serm. 66, De Tempore.

† Heu cur erubescis confiteri, quæ facere nunquam erubuisti? Lib. ij., De Visit. Infirmorum, cap. 5.

‡ Melius est coram uno aliquantulum ruboris tolerare, quam in die judicii, coram tot millibus hominum gravi compulsâ notatum tabescere.

Judge and Avenger of these very sins no less a person than God Himself."*

328. It may be further observed, that if we form the habit of concealing faults, venial though they be, we expose ourselves to the danger of having, at the hour of death, to withstand the fierce assaults of our hellish foes, who, at that last moment, avail themselves of every slight advantage, and bring up against us all our sins, mortal or venial, to throw our poor soul into consternation; and if they chance to find sins not confessed, even though these be not looked upon by us as mortal, they exaggerate and magnify them in their baleful light, and make them appear greater than they really are, in order to force the sinner into discouragement, dejection, and despair of God's goodness. Venerable Bede relates† that a certain soldier, who was a great favourite of king Coered, was often exhorted by him to go to Confession, as the king was aware of the ungodly life the man was leading, and with how many sins he was defiled. But the soldier parried all the pious king's endeavours by promising to fulfil his duty at some more convenient season. Being at length seized with a dangerous disease, the king, for the love he bore him, went in person to visit him, and profited by the occasion to exhort him anew to settle his accounts with God by an exact Confession. The sick man replied that he meant to confess on his recovery, because he feared that if he should confess before getting well, his friends might say he did it out of the fear of death. The king most graciously returned to pay him a second visit, and on his entering the room the invalid began to exclaim, "Sire, what do you want with me now? you can give me no help!" "What folly is this?" replied the king in an indignant tone. "No folly," replied the dying man, "but the very truth. Know then that but a few minutes ago there came into the room two youths of most engaging appearance, who presented me with a book, beautiful indeed to look at, but very, very small in size. In it I saw the list of my good deeds registered; but, good God! how few and how trifling

* Qui peccata sua occultat, et erubescit salubriter confiteri, Deum, quem judicem habebit, habebit et ultorem. Serm. 66, De Tempore.

† Lib. v. Hist. Eccl., cap. 14.

they are! Behind these youths appeared a group of infernal spirits, horrible to behold, one of whom bore on his shoulders a vast volume, of great weight, which contained the list of my sins written in dread characters.* I read there not only my grievous, but even my most trivial offences—those which I committed in passing thought.† At the first appearance of this frightful vision the chief of the infernal crew said to these two angelic youths, 'What are you staying here for, since you have neither part nor lot in this man, who is already our prey?' Take him, then, replied the latter, 'and lead him whither the burden of his iniquities is weighing him down.' At these words they disappeared. Then one demon dealt me a thrust with a fork on the head, another on the feet, making me suffer fearful torments, and I now feel them creeping into my very vitals, whence they will soon tear out my wretched soul." Having said this, he breathed his last most miserably. The reader should mark well that the devils reproached this wretched man with the sins he had committed by passing thoughts,‡ although they were well aware that he was laden with a multitude of the most grievous sins, which would have sufficed for his damnation. Think, then, what he will do to devout persons, to whom he can recall only their venial sins, should they suffer an idle fear to close their lips in the sacred tribunal! He will surely exaggerate them, and triumph on account of them. Certain it is that the enemy has often made use of venial sins, at the hour of death, as powerful engines of war, for the undoing of the servants of God. Ecclesiastical history bears witness to the truth of this statement. The devout person should then open out his several failings as often as he goes to Confession, and subduing all repugnance or shame by which the devil seeks to dishearten him, should wash away all his faults in the Blood of Christ. Nay, more, as I have remarked so lately, he should discover to his Confessor all the temptations of the demon, and all his own evil inclinations. Then, indeed,

* Proferens codicem horrendæ visionis, et magnitudinis enormis, et ponderis pœne importabilis.

† Quem cum legissem, inveni omnia scelera, non solum quæ verbo, et opere, sed etiam quæ tenuissimâ cogitatione peccavi.

‡ Quæ tenuissimâ cogitatione peccaverat.

will he go forth from this sacred laver pure and white as is the snow.

329. Finally, Confession must be simple, without duplicity, or excuses, or cloaking our failings. This is the fifth condition we have purposed to explain. "Confession should be made with simplicity," says St. Bernard; "hence we must not excuse the evil intent whereby we have sinned, for to do this is not to confess, but rather to hide and excuse faults. This is not to appease, but, on the contrary, to irritate the Divine Majesty." And the holy Abbot adds further, that we must not wander from the sin confessed: in other words, we should not strive to excuse our sin, or to give it another face; either alleging that we have been led into it by the persuasion of others who have urged us on to do evil, or else by enlarging on the occasions which have tempted us to transgress: as it is not, of course, possible that any man should fall into sin against his will. To act thus would show want of gratitude for God's goodness, since, despite His readiness to forgive every transgression, we behave towards Him with insincerity and duplicity.* Women, even those who are devout, are too apt to commit this fault in their Confessions: they like to tell long stories, into which they interweave the history of their sins at full length; the upshot of which is, that they lay the blame on their neighbours, or on such of their household, servants, or other people, as may have given occasion to their transgressions. At times, too, it happens that—overcome by a certain shame which they feel more than others—though unable to gloss over the misdeed in itself, they excuse their intention, giving it some colour of goodness, or at least making it appear less bad than it really was. The Director should warn them, for God's sake, to be on their guard against such double dealing, as this mode of confessing sins is an excusing, rather than accusing, themselves of their faults. In this manner of confessing sins they run great risk of

* Oportet confessionem esse simplicem. Non intentionem (forte quia latet homines) excusare delectet, si sit rea: nec lævigare culpam, quæ gravis est; nec alieno adumbrare suasu, cum invitum nemo coegerit. Primum illud non confessio est, sed defensio; nec placat, sed provocat. Sequens monstrat ingratitudinem. Ex quo minor reputatur culpa, eo minuitur et gloria indultoris. Serm. 16, In Cant.

not receiving pardon at all, or at least of not gaining from this Sacrament that purity of conscience which they hoped to receive.

330. To conclude, then. The devout soul should approach this Sacrament with an efficacious sorrow for sin, to which must be joined a profound humility and an unshaken trust in God's mercy. All should declare, with great simplicity, and without palliation or excuse, every single sin, as well as every evil disposition which generally gives rise to sins. By doing this frequently, especially when burdened with some notable transgression, not only shall we be wholly cleansed, but we shall moreover gain strength against similar falls for the future. Thus, by means of this holy sacrament, will be obtained that purity of heart which is the ultimate disposition to the love of God and to our own perfection; as we have already shown in the first Chapter. To this may be added another most important reflection; it is this: that Confession made frequently, and in the way specified above, is a most effectual means of disarming our ghostly enemy, and thus disabling him from doing us injury, and hindering our spiritual progress. It is easy to account for this, since all the power which the enemy has over us comes from the sins that we commit. If these be mortal, they put him in full possession of our souls; if venial, though they do not confer a dominion on him, still they embolden him to attack us with greater vigour. It thence follows, that if we confess duly and frequently, the soul will be habitually free from sin; and thus the devil will be deprived of all dominion over us and will have no courage or power to harm us; so that we shall be more free and unshackled in our course towards perfection. Cesarius relates,* that a theologian of blameless life, being about to die, beheld the devil lurking in a corner of his room; and he addressed the fiend in the words of St. Martin, "What art thou doing here, thou cruel beast?"† He then, by virtue of his priestly power, commanded the evil spirit to declare what it was that most injured him and his fellows in this world. Though thus adjured, the devil remained silent, and gave no answer. Not allowing himself to be baffled, the

* Lib. ij. Mir., cap. 38.

† Quid hic adstas, cruenta bestia?

Priest conjured the demon, in the name of God, to answer him, and answer with truth. The fiend thereupon made this reply: "There is nothing in the Church which does us so much harm, which so unnerves our power, as frequent Confession."* Hence, whoever aspires to perfection, should confess often, and see that his Confessions are good.

CHAPTER V.

HOW FAR GENERAL CONFESSIONS HELP US TO ACQUIRE CLEANNESS OF HEART, AND CONSEQUENTLY TO ATTAIN TO PERFECTION.

331. As regards General Confession, the Director will bear in mind the following maxim, laid down by most theologians: that to some it is necessary; to others it is injurious; and to some again advantageous. It is necessary to all who in their former Confessions have failed in any essential point of the Sacrament; for instance, by wilfully concealing mortal sins, or approaching the sacred tribunal without the requisite dispositions of sorrow and good purpose. There is no question but that such as these are bound to make a General Confession, at least for the time over which their sacrilegious Confessions extend; for, far from receiving the Sacrament, they have done it great injury by their omissions and wilful want of due disposition. And hence, as their sins are nowise blotted out, they must needs be submitted anew to the judgment of the Priest, that they may be washed away in the Blood of our Saviour. To such, a General Confession is a means without which they cannot be saved. But we are considering the case of spiritual persons who have not been guilty of these sacrileges; hence we will not discuss this point. To some, General Confession would be prejudicial. There are certain timid and scrupulous souls who have already, and sufficiently, made this general review of their consciences; who have even done much more than duty required of them on this head, and

* Nihil est in ecclesiâ, quod tantum nobis noceat, quod sic virtutes nostras enervet, quam frequens confessio.

yet they cannot be at rest. They wish to recommence their Confessions from the beginning, and to go again over the same story, hoping thus to calm the fears and alarms that agitate their hearts. The Director must not listen to these people, since, in their case, to repeat a General Confession is much the same thing as stirring up a hornets' nest, and would result in their being stung more than ever with thousands of scruples, and wounded all over with fears and troubles of spirit. The reason of this is, that the alarms and terrors which agitate these scrupulous souls are not grounded on solid reasons, but on baseless apprehensions, which the remembrance of past sins can serve only to encourage, and to quicken so as to double the disturbance in the mind. Hence it happens that the more these people seek to attain to peace by means of Confessions repeated over and over again, the further are they from finding that peace. The only way of calming the troubled mind of such penitents, is to command them most imperatively never more to mention their past sins, and to compel them to submit in obedience to the decision of him who holds the place of God.

332. The thought that agitates these poor souls, and by its continual recurrence inflicts on them a kind of martyrdom, mostly takes the following shape:—"If in my General or Particular Confessions I have omitted some one mortal sin, what will become of me?" Hence, the Director must see that this empty phantom be banished from their minds, and must drive from their hearts these groundless fears by quoting the teaching of St. Thomas (with which all theologians agree) that mortal sins omitted in Confession, through forgetfulness, after a reasonable diligence in the examination of conscience, are indirectly remitted by means of sacramental absolution, as it is impossible to blot out one mortal sin without blotting out all the others. Light and darkness are not more incompatible than are sanctifying grace and mortal sin. And as the sunbeams cannot partly chase away, and partly blend with, the mists of night, which must vanish as soon as the sun is seen on the horizon; so too, sanctifying grace, when it enters into the soul, is incompatible with grievous sins: it cannot drive out some and leave others un-

affected; but must needs make all vanish from before it. Hence the sinner having been restored to grace by means of a proper Confession, all his mortal sins whatsoever, whether he have mentioned them or forgotten them, are wholly cancelled. Thus the Director will tell such penitents to be of good cheer, for supposing what causes them such alarm to have really happened, —granting, namely, that their memory may have failed to retain such and such sins, which have slipped from among the crowd of many others,—still they are forgiven; and in spite of this failing of the memory the penitent is in God's grace and on the path of salvation. With the assurance that this is the case, the Confessor will restore peace and calm.*

333. Lastly, some there are for whom it is highly useful to make a General Confession. For instance, such as have not yet made one in all their lives; and, as a general rule, it will be found a great help to devout persons to make one every year, beginning from the last they have made. Some recent authors, I am aware, have disapproved of this praiseworthy usage, but without sufficient grounds; as the rule of the venerable Order of Citeaux (sanctioned as it is by the Sovereign Pontiffs) obliges all those who follow it to make an annual General Confession. St. Ignatius, too, has prescribed it in his Constitutions to his children; and St. Bonaventure recommends the practice to his Religious.† St. Thomas, discussing with the strictest logical method this very point, approves of the practice highly.‡ And Benedict XI. enjoins Confessors of Religious Orders to advise their penitents to make this yearly General Confession to their Parish Priests, not as a matter of duty, but of counsel merely.§ Lastly, we may allege in favour of this holy custom the example of so many Saints, who have not only commended it in others, but have themselves practised it. Thus we read of the holy Bishop

* Ille qui confitetur, veniam consequitur, nisi sit fictus. Sed ille qui confitetur omnia peccata, quæ in memoriâ habet, aliquorum oblitus, non ex hoc est fictus, quia ignorantiam facti patitur, quæ a peccato excusat. Ergo veniam consequitur. Et sic peccata, quæ oblita sunt, relaxantur; cum impium sit dimidiam sperare veniam. Suppl. 3 part., q. 10, art. 5.

† In Regul. Novit., cap. 3. ‡ Dist. 4, 17, q. 3. art. 4.

§ In Extravag., Inter cunctas, s. Ceterum.

Eligius, that, desirous of more exact purity of conscience, he made a General Confession to a Priest of all the sins he had committed from his earliest childhood, after which he began to advance with greater earnestness and fervour of spirit in the way of perfection.* It is related in the life of St. Engelbert, that having retired to his domestic Oratory in company with another Bishop, he accused himself before him of all the sins he had committed, with such a profusion of tears that they flowed down copiously over his breast; so that his Confessor was no less edified than astonished at the heartiness and intensity of his repentance. The next morning, he resumed the confession of certain other of his failings with a like abundance of tears.† But the lives of the Saints are full of such instances, so that it is needless to relate more of the same description.

334. The reason for which the Saints so highly commended this general accusation, not only of all the sins of our life, but of those which we continue to commit during the course of each succeeding year, is precisely that which has been so fully insisted upon in the present Article. I mean to say that a General Confession is a most sure means of acquiring purity of heart and conscience, and consequently helps much to the attainment of perfection. For, beholding at a glance all the faults into which we have fallen, whether during our whole lives or in the course of the past year, we must needs be stirred up to a more lively contrition than can be excited by the recollection of those ordinary failings which usually form the matter of the Confessions which are called Particular, as contradistinguished from General. Far different, indeed, is the confusion and humility which fills the mind at the sight of a whole legion of sins, from that which is occasioned by the consciousness of some single fault into which we have been but lately betrayed. One or two regiments cannot have that power against the enemy which is possessed by the vast serried mass of the battalions of which an army consists. Exactly thus, one or two faults of which we accuse ourselves in our ordinary Confessions, cannot have the force which the whole host of our failings possess to subdue our hearts, to soften

* Surius. In Vitâ S. Eligii. † Idem. In Vitâ S. Engelberti.

them into perfect contrition, and to bring us to a deep sense of humility and inward self-abasement. The good King Ezechias set before his eyes the sins he had committed during all the years of his life, and made a General Confession of them unto God; and by so doing stirred up within himself a great bitterness of soul; that is, a great sorrow and feeling of repentance.* It is plain that this more lively repentance, this deeper, inward, and most real humility, must needs have more power to cleanse the soul and help it to attain more speedily to purity of heart; and this all the more, as the purpose of amendment is commonly efficacious in the exact ratio of the sorrow we conceive for sin, and of the assistance given by the grace of God, enabling us to carry out our resolution of amendment. Hence, purity of conscience is insured not only as regards the past, but the future also. To this may be added, that the Confessor obtains a clearer insight into the state of his penitent. He can appreciate his spiritual loss and gain. He sees which are his dominant passions, in what virtues he fails the most, and to what faults he is most liable. He is thus enabled to prescribe more special means, to give advice better suited to the particular case, to suggest remedies more adapted to the peculiar needs of each one. Hence we may justly infer that such Confessions are a most effectual means to the purification and consequent perfection of the soul.

335. Christ Himself has been pleased to give us a striking illustration of this doctrine in the instance of that well-known penitent, Saint Margaret of Cortona.† Beholding the fervent conversion of this once sinful woman, our Blessed Lord began to instruct and encourage her in divers ways, showing Himself to her, overflowing with love and tender compassion, and often addressing her as His "*Poor little one!*" One day the holy penitent, in a transport of that confidence which is the natural fruit of filial love, said to Him, "O my Lord, Thou always callest me Thy 'poor little one.' Am I ever to have the happiness of hearing Thy divine lips call me by the sweet name of 'My daughter'?"

* Recogitabo tibi omnes annos meos, in amaritudine animæ meæ. Isai. xxxviij. 25.

† Francesco Marchese. Vita di S. Margherita da Cortona, cap. 7.

"Thou art not yet worthy of it," replied our Blessed Saviour. "Before thou canst receive the treatment and the name of 'Daughter,' thou must more thoroughly cleanse thy soul by a general accusation of all thy faults." On hearing this, Margaret applied herself to searching into her conscience; and during eight days consecutively, disclosed her sins to a Priest, by means of sobs and tears rather than of words. After her Confession, she took off her veil, put a rope round her neck, and in this humble attire went to receive the most Holy Body of the Lord. Scarce had she partaken, when she heard most clearly in her inmost soul the word "Daughter." At this most sweet name, to hear which she had longed so ardently, she was rapt at once in an ecstasy, and remained immersed, as it were, in an ocean of gladness and delight. On recovering from her most happy trance she began to exclaim, as one beside herself, "Oh! sweet word, 'Daughter!' Oh! loving name! Oh! word full of joy! Oh! sound replete with assurance, 'Daughter!'" The reader may thus perceive how much a General Confession, and the preparation it implies, avails to cleanse, purify, and make beautiful the soul; since by its means this holy woman rose from the vile condition of a servant, in which she was at the beginning of her conversion, to the honourable rank of a well-beloved daughter. So that, she who was at first gazed upon by the Redeemer's pitying glances, was afterwards contemplated by Him with love and most tender complacency. Therefore devout souls will do well to confess at the close of each year the sins of which they have already accused themselves, and Directors should require annual Confession of such of their penitents as aspire to a spiritual life. For persons making these yearly Confessions, with sentiments of contrition and with an earnest desire of advancement, cannot but attain through them to a greater wakefulness of spiritual faculties and to a more undefiled purity of conscience.

336. I remember once reading that a Dominican novice, having one night fallen asleep near the altar, heard a voice calling to him, "Go, and have thy tonsure renewed."* On awaking, the

* Vade, et iterum rade caput tuum. In Vitis Patrum Prædicatorum, Part. iv. c. 7.

youth understood how God, by that voice, would have him confess his sins again. He went directly to cast himself at the feet of St. Dominic, and repeated his last Confession with greater care, and with more searching accuracy and diligence. Shortly after, he retired to rest. In the midst of his slumbers, he beheld an Angel coming down from heaven, bearing in his hands a golden crown, all set with priceless gems; and the Angel winging his flight towards him, placed this crown upon his head, as an ornament to his brows. Every Director may give the like warning to devout penitents. They too, he may tell them, should take occasion of the approach of some special day or great festival. Let him say to each one of them, "'Renew thy tonsure;' prepare for a yearly Confession which may cleanse thy soul, and render it wholly fair and bright and pure in the sight of the Lord." Then let him help them in all charity, prescribing such remedies and giving such warnings, as he may know to be suitable to their needs. Thus he will have the consolation of seeing them crowned, not indeed in this life but in the next, with a brilliant crown of resplendent stars.

CHAPTER VI.

PRACTICAL HINTS TO DIRECTORS ON THE SUBJECT OF THE FOREGOING CHAPTERS.

337. FIRST suggestion. As regards the doctrine set forth in the first Chapter of this Article, it must be observed that the excessive reluctance felt by some Confessors in giving absolution to certain excellent persons who live in great purity of conscience, is by no means to be commended. I have chanced to meet with one who, for six months together, had withheld absolution from a penitent of most innocent life, though this Confessor meanwhile permitted frequent Communion. And I have also met with another case of a Confessor, who, while often allowing all the nuns of a convent to approach constantly to the Lord's table, in

order to feed on the Bread of Angels, seldom gave them absolution when they made their Confessions. It is hard to say how these Priests found heart to withhold from their penitents a spiritual gift so precious as that which is imparted in the sacred tribunal by means of holy absolution. It is unquestionable that thereby the soul recovers grace if lost, or receives an increase of grace, if it has not been lost. Thus we gain at least an additional degree of sanctifying grace; in other words, what of itself would suffice to render us eternally happy in heaven above. And further, this Sacrament imparts strength and remedies against relapses into our customary faults, an effect which, according to the Angelic Doctor, is common to all and each of the Sacraments.* Wherefore, then, deprive souls of treasures so priceless, with which they would have been enriched, had the Priest only been willing to exercise on their behalf the power committed to him for their spiritual good?

338. These Confessors may answer, that they withhold absolution for two reasons:—First, because in the Confessions which such penitents make, they cannot find certain matter for absolution. Secondly, because the faults of which these persons accuse themselves are trivial, and not easily corrected, being rooted in their temperament and natural inclinations. Hence they are in doubt as to the presence of the dispositions requisite for the due reception of the Sacrament, that is, of real sorrow and efficacious purpose of amendment, both of which are required in these Confessions as well as in others. But objections of this nature are wholly groundless. The first has no foundation, since all theologians are agreed that a sin may furnish matter for repeated absolutions; so that by repenting of, and confessing, some sin of their past life (as may easily be suggested to them by their Confessors), they furnish a matter suitable and amply sufficient for valid absolution. We know that St. Charles Borromeo, St. Ignatius of Loyola, St. Francis Borgia, and other great Servants of God, confessed daily, and daily received absolution. Now, it is quite

* Est autem omnibus sacramentis commune, quod per ea exhibeatur aliquod remedium contra peccatum, per hoc quod gratiam conferunt. 3 p., qu. 4, alias 63, art. 6, in corp.

certain that they could not have supplied matter for absolution in the faults committed every day of their lives. But by mentioning some one sin of former years, they ensured the validity of the absolution, and at the same time cleansed their consciences of those slight stains which, being men as the rest of us, they could not but daily contract. Such are the ideas which a Director should adopt concerning the administration of this Sacrament.

339. Neither is the second objection which is made at all more valid; for Divines teach, that if a penitent, confessing venial sins, repents efficaciously of some, but not so of others (on account of his sense of the great danger of a relapse into them), the Confession is good, and the absolution valid. Because lesser sins, of which we duly repent, supply a sufficient matter for absolution; and those of which we do not sufficiently repent offer no obstacle. For, as we are under no grievous obligation to confess such sins, neither can we be strictly bound to have sorrow for them. The Director will therefore engage his penitents of this class to make a point of always mentioning some one or other of the sins of their former life, especially such as they hold in detestation, and are not likely to fall into again. Following this plan, there can never be question as to the sincerity of their contrition for these faults; and so, granting that on the score of sorrow for their daily slight transgressions their dispositions be doubtful, they may be absolved without any danger of exposing the Sacrament to invalidity. St. Bonaventure was fully aware that novices, occupied as they are in devout exercises, with no thought but of their perfection, are not wont to commit even venial sins that are deliberate, though they frequently fall into failings which, being rooted in the natural character, are difficult to correct. Yet he counsels them to go to Confession every day.* Hence we both may and should absolve those who present nothing in Confession but defects of this nature, provided the above-named precautions be taken by the penitents. I do not mean to say, that when a penitent is to communicate upon several days in succession, that he should confess on every single day (supposing him, of course, to have no need of Confession); nor do I mean that absolution

* In Regul. Novitior., c. 3.

should be given every time that Confession is made. I say only, that when an interval of a few days occurs between one Confession and another, absolution should not be refused when it is wished for; that thus the penitent may not be deprived of the increase of sanctifying grace, and of the additional help conferred in this Sacrament for the correction of his faults.

340. Second suggestion. As for the sorrow of which we treated in the second Chapter, the Director will beware of giving too much credit to the complaint of certain timorous souls, who think themselves unable to conceive real sorrow for their sins, and on that account are much pained, and experience even great agony of mind, whenever they approach the sacred tribunal in order to be cleansed from their faults. With such persons we must bear in mind the teaching of the Angelic Doctor, which is followed by all Divines. He distinguishes in contrition a twofold sorrow, one which he calls essential, and which resides entirely in the will, that is in the spiritual part of the soul. By this kind of sorrow we disavow the evil we have done, and repent of it by an act which is not sensibly felt, because it is entirely spiritual, like the power of the soul from which it proceeds.* The other kind of sorrow has its seat in the emotional part of the soul, and is only an overflow of the act of the will; the emotion which arises from it in the sensitive part, so to say, of the soul; that is in the affections.† Now we should ever remember that everything belonging to the essence of contrition proceeds from the will. It is not a feeling in the sensitive part of our nature. And sorrow of the will, not mere emotion of the feelings, is required for Confession. The feeling of sorrow is only a sympathetic correspondence of the regret or disavowal of the will, and it does not depend upon us to feel it or not, since it affects the sensitive appetite; which power, as the Angelic Doctor observes, at times obeys, and as frequently disobeys the superior part of the

* In contritione est duplex dolor: unus est in ipsâ voluntate, qui est essentialiter ipsa contritio, quæ nihil aliud est, quam displicentia peccati præteriti.

† Alius dolor est in parte sensitivâ, qui causatur ex ipso dolore, vel ex necessitate naturæ, secundum quod vires inferiores sequuntur motum superiorum. Suppl. 3 part., q. 3, a. 1, in corp.

soul.* Thus, it may frequently happen that the will is sincerely repentant, without making any corresponding impression on the emotional part of the soul; so that one who is really penitent may appear to himself not to have any contrition at all.

341. If, then, the Director find that his penitent asks of God the necessary sorrow, and uses all his endeavours to stir it up at least in his will, and is further resolved to sin no more, he may relieve that penitent's mind from all scruple, and remove all anxiety, by assuring him that he has the requisite sorrow, even though he feel it not, and though his heart be harder than flint. He should especially insist on these timorous souls making their acts of sorrow in calmness and peace, without effort or straining; for this would only have the effect of disquieting the soul, and of preventing the motions of the will from producing any impression on the heart. And the more we strive after sensible affections, the less do we feel them. So much the more, too, as this wearying anxiety prevents such acts from being perfectly performed by the will, inasmuch as it hinders the light and inward motion of the Holy Ghost, Who does not usually work on souls that are not in calm and at peace.

342. Third suggestion. When we spoke in the fourth Chapter of that integrity of Confession which most conduces to perfection, we said that it ought to extend to everything, even to the smallest and slightest faults. But still, in this avowal of sin, a certain reserve and discretion must be used to avoid falling into excess. There are certain pious persons who feel such sorrow for their past sins that they are never contented, but wish to renew the accusation of them over and over again, and would, if allowed, confess them afresh every day. These good persons need to be taught that this is not the proper penance for their former transgressions. St. Thomas distinguishes two sorts of penitence, the one internal, the other external. The former consists in sorrow and regret for the faults we have committed; and this, says the Saint, ought to be unceasing, and should never be laid aside

* Non obedit affectus inferior superiori ad nutum, ut tanta, et talis passio sequatur in inferiori appetitu, qualem ordinat superior.

throughout our life.* St. John Chrysostom, treating of this inward penitence, expresses the same opinion. He teaches that it should be lasting; as it is a mark of great humility to keep ever in mind, and to mourn over, our past sins. This he proves by the example of St. Paul, who, when his present life was free from sins, kept ever in mind the sins of his former life, even though they had long since been washed away by the waters of baptism, for he knew that to have former sins constantly before the mind gives birth to sorrow, regret, tears, and compunction of heart.† St. Augustine, in like manner, says, that we should be sorry all our life long for our faults; for, when we cease to grieve over them, penitence wholly fails, as it consists chiefly in sorrow.‡

343. Outward penitence, as St. Thomas goes on to observe, consists in the accusation we make of our sins to a Confessor. But, he says, this need not be continual, as interior penitence must be; but should cease when all has been done which God's commandment and the needs of the soul require.§ The Director will be guided by these instructions; and when he meets with some person full of deep repentance of his faults, and eager to confess them again and again in order the better to blot them out, he will exhort him rather to repent of them, and to confess them before God alone at the foot of the Crucifix, to renew his sorrow for them in his meditations and private devotions, to conceive an inward shame on their account, with sentiments of deep

* Interior quidem pœnitentia est, quâ quis dolet de peccato commisso. Et talis pœnitentia debet durare usque ad finem vitæ: semper enim debet homini displicere, quod peccavit. 3 part., q. 25, alias 84, art. 8, in corp.

† Tantum boni confert meminisse frequentius hominem peccati sui, ut etiam Paulum Apostolum videamus ea, quæ jam oblita fuerant, et deleta, adducere in medium. Et cum culpam de præsentibus non haberet, quoniam recordationem peccatorum, et luctum, gemitumque, sciebat animæ prodesse, etiam illa commemorat, quæ per ignorantiam commissa, gratia Baptismi, et confessio fidei absolverat. Lib. ij., De Compunct. Cordis.

‡ Quid restat nobis, nisi semper dolere in vitâ? Ubi enim dolor finitur, deficit pœnitentia. Lib. de Verâ et Falsâ Pœnit., c. 13.

§ Pœnitentia vero exterior est, quâ quis exteriora signa doloris ostendit, et verbo tenus peccata sua confitetur sacerdoti absolventi: et juxta ejus arbitrium satisfacit. Et talis pœnitentia non oportet quod duret usque ad finem vitæ, sed usque ad determinatum tempus, secundum mensuram peccati. Loco supracitato.

humility and heartfelt compunction; but to forbear mentioning them in Confession (supposing always the requirements of duty to have been complied with), as the inward, not the outward, penitence is now more suitable, more advantageous, and better adapted to ensure the pardon of the past.

CHAPTER VII.

CERTAIN DIFFICULTIES WHICH DETER PRIESTS FROM UNDERTAKING THE MINISTRY OF HEARING CONFESSIONS, OR WHICH MAKE THEM WITHDRAW FROM IT.

344. In the preceding Chapter, we have given Directors some advice, which they will find useful in instructing their penitents how to make their Confessions. It will not be amiss to add a few considerations as to the manner in which Confessors should undertake the holy duty of hearing Confessions, and never withdraw from it: and we will, moreover, remove certain difficulties which might deter them from so laborious a ministry. Some Priests who, in other respects, are well fitted for the Confessional, refuse to accept this charge, or retire from it after a certain interval of time, because they think themselves unable to give correct decisions upon the numerous cases presented in the sacred tribunal, in difficult and delicate matters, by persons of every class, state of life, habits, and natural gifts; and because they despair of success in remedying diseases so serious and sometimes so incurable as those to which our poor nature is subject. If such Priests are considered to be fit for this sacred ministry by those set over them (who are the most competent judges in this matter), they should take heart; for God assists in a special manner those Priests who administer this Sacrament with an upright intention, and He enlightens them to determine and judge correctly cases which are in themselves most difficult; suggesting suitable remedies for even those extraordinary spiritual diseases with which they would

be wholly unable to cope were they not engaged in the holy ministry. Let them hearken to the encouragement given them by St. Augustine, who quotes his own experience. "I can bear witness to myself," says this great Doctor, "that I am moved in quite a different way when an educated man comes to receive instruction, or one who is wholly ignorant; a neighbour, or a stranger; a rich man, or a poor man; one whose life is private, or one who holds some office in the state. I am variously affected by differences of nation, sex, age, or of the errors with which persons have been imbued; and what I say to each one is suited to each, being begun, continued, and ended in accordance with this interior motion."*

345. See how God supplies His ministers with knowledge befitting the condition and needs of those who throw themselves at their feet to ask for spiritual help. Nor let any one object that these lights were given to St. Augustine because he was a saint, but that he himself does not deserve such a gift because he is a sinful man. This objection ignores the fact that the assistances granted by God to His ministers for the spiritual advantage of their neighbour are mostly to be classed with the *gratiæ gratis datæ*, which, according to St. Thomas and the common teaching of Theologians, do not presuppose any special deserts on the part of him who receives them, as they are not bestowed with reference chiefly to himself, but for the sole advantage and benefit of others. So that, whatever his own demerits may be, a Director need not fear that God will refuse him the necessary light for his own guidance and the direction of others, whenever it be wanted.

346. St. Augustine goes on to say that, besides these lights and inward motions with which God directs those who have the direction of souls, charity itself becomes their instructress and guide, and suggests the remedies suited to the needs of each penitent.

* De me ipso tibi testis sum, aliter et aliter me moveri, cum ante me catechizandum video eruditum, inertem, civem, peregrinum, divitem, pauperem, privatum, honoratum, in potestate aliquâ constitutum, illius et illius gentis hominem; illius, aut illius ætatis, aut sexûs, et illa, aut illa secta; ex illo, vel alio errore venientem: ac pro diversitate motûs mei sermo ipse procedit, et progreditur, et finitur. Lib. de Catechiz. Rudib., cap. 15.

The Saint says, "that though the Director should have charity towards every one, yet this charity should not prescribe the same remedies to all indiscriminately; because charity begets some souls unto God, with others it deals affably and compassionately; some it seeks to edify, others it fears to shock; it lowers itself down to some, and raises itself above others; with some it is mild, with others severe; but it is the enemy of no one, and a mother to each and every one."* The Saint, by these words, means to show that charity supplies God's ministers with a pure inward rule, which enables them to adapt themselves to the condition, station, character, habits, needs and inclinations of each one, so as to be useful to each and all. Hence a priest who has been pronounced competent to undertake the cure of souls, must not lose heart; he has only to trust in God and to put on the bowels of charity, to be justified in hoping that he may exercise this sacred ministry with profit to others and merit to himself.

347. Some Priests retire from this holy employment, because they fear lest in hearing and searching into the temptations and frailties of their penitents, the defilement of others should stick to their own souls; hence they refuse to help their neighbours at so dear a cost to themselves. "But," as St. Gregory observes, "far from a pastor's heart be so empty a fear; for not only will God never allow that the temptations which may arise from hearing Confessions turn to the spiritual harm of Directors, but He will so dispose matters, that they be less liable to their own peculiar temptations the more charitably they devote themselves to the remedy of their neighbours' infirmity."† The Priest has but to keep the eye of a pure intention steadily fixed on the glory of

* Et quia eum eadem omnibus debeatur caritas, non eadem est omnibus adhibenda medicina: ipsa item caritas alios parturit, cum aliis infirmatur; alios curat ædificare, alios contremiscit offendere; ad alios se inclinat, ad alios se erigit; aliis blanda, aliis severa, nulli inimica, omnibus mater. Ibid.

† Fit plerumque, ut dum rectoris animus aliena tentamenta condescendendo cognoscit, auditis tentationibus etiam ipse pulsetur; quia hæc eadem, per quam populi multitudo diluitur, aqua, procul dubio, luto inquinatur. Nam dum sordes diluentium suscipit, quasi suæ munditiæ serenitatem perdit. Sed hæc nequaquam pastori timenda sunt: quia Deo subtiliter cuncta pensante, tanto facilius a suâ eripitur, quanto misericordius ex alienâ tentatione fatigatur. Pastor., Par. ij., cap. 5.

God, and his penitent's spiritual good; he has only to observe due caution; and he will have no reason to fear any evil whatever. God will arrange so that the turbid waters of the temptations and frailties of others shall be changed into a bath, wherein the Confessor's own soul will be cleansed and rendered brighter and fairer in His sight: for of a truth no one has ever damned himself in labouring to save others from damnation.

348. Certain Priests are very diligent at first in hearing Confessions; but after a time, perceiving that their words and counsels, their pious industries and various efforts, fail to produce the desired result—because their penitents ever relapse into the same sins, expose themselves to the same occasions, give way to the same foibles—they get discouraged, lose heart, and feeling their employment an irksome task, come at last to give it up altogether. These should be convinced that the correction and amendment of their penitents depends primarily not on their own efforts, but on the workings of divine grace; that they ought to rouse firm trust and ground it on God, in the fixed persuasion that there is no person, however far he may have wandered from the right path, but may be recalled by the might of God's grace, and brought back to the way of salvation; and may, should it so please the Almighty, become even eminent in holiness.* Hence the Confessor must never despair, nor cease to warn, admonish, advise, rebuke, entreat, try new means, use new expedients, and, above all, pray that God would soften the hard hearts of these incorrigible sinners. St. Augustine illustrates this by the following beautiful comparison. He says we should deal with souls thus fallen asleep in vice, as a loving son treats his aged father who has fallen into a deadly stupor, and is given over by the physicians. Although he sees plainly that this baleful lethargy is the forerunner of death, he never tires of calling to his father, of shaking him, of being kindly cruel with him; so that, though die he must, he may die as late as possible.† The holy Doctor draws this important conclusion,

* Potens est Deus de lapidibus istis suscitare filios Abrahæ. Luc., v. 8.

† Plerumque istum caritatis affectum exhibet etiam filius seni patri jam jamque morituro post paucos dies. Jam utique, ætate finitâ, si lethargicum

that if natural affection prompt us thus to be importunate with our parents and others dear to us, in order to prolong the temporal life of the body here below, how much more meet is it that we should deal in like manner with our spiritual friends (I mean our neighbours), with a view to gain for them everlasting life; so as never to be disgusted, however low they may have sunk, nor weary of holding out to them a helping hand.*

349. But granting that the toil and trouble of the Confessor fail of obtaining any change for the better, wherefore should he lose heart? Why should he give up the administration of this Sacrament? His own reward and guerdon are secure, for God does not recompense His ministers only for the actual conversion of souls (which depends not on them, but on Himself alone), but rather for the labours gone through by them in the endeavour to promote it. Nay more, it often happens, that the less the fruit of our labours, the richer our crown; if only the earnestness, the patience, the zeal and charity, wherewith we have striven for it, have been great. The Director thus being insured against all personal loss in this exercise of charity, has no cause for faintheartedness or discouragement; no kind of excuse for giving it up.

350. There are other Priests who get weary and disgusted at having to listen ever to the same sins, especially when the same penitents have continual recourse to them; there is the old story, the identical particulars; and they are tired of being obliged to repeat over and over again the same warnings, the same counsels, the same rebukes; of having to employ the same means, and applying the same remedies. The more so, as some penitents are rough and rude, and cannot express their meaning properly; others are dull and stupid, and do not understand the Priest; others stubborn and hard to move: all which ends by making Confessors feel abhorrence for this sacred ministry, so that they exercise it with disgust,

videt, et lethargico morbo premi a medico agnoscit, dicente sibi: excita patrem tuum, noli eum permittere dormire, si vis ut vivat: adest puer seni, pulsat vellicat, pungit, pietate molestus est: nec mori cito permittit, cito moriturum. De Verb. Dom., Serm., 59, c. 12.

* Quanto majores nos caritate amicis nostris molesti esse debemus, cum quibus non paucos in hoc mundo dies, sed apud Deum in æternum vivamus?

and, at length, either wholly abandon it, or continue it with but small interest. Such as these should lay to heart the words of St. Augustine when speaking of the annoyance we feel while instructing children of a tender age and of little capacity for learning, and we have to repeat the same things a hundred times. What is said of teaching children, applies no less to the weariness which we cannot but feel at having to deal ever with the same matters, and with the self-same persons, often, too, quite uneducated, in the sacred tribunal of Confession. "When you feel wearied," says the Saint, "of repeating always the same advice, and dealing always with the same petty details, stir up within your breast a father's love and a mother's gentle tenderness. Love will knit your heart with that of your pupil, and will give novelty and interest to the very things which you are obliged to repeat so constantly. Compassionating love causes us to dwell in the soul of him who is listening to us, and makes him dwell within our soul; so that, while he is listening he seems as if he spoke through us; and we, when teaching him, seem in a manner to be taught by him."* The Saint goes on to illustrate this by a very apt simile. "Imagine," he says, "that a dear friend comes to visit you from far-off countries. You take him through the city, you show him the palaces, the churches, the parks and gardens, the public buildings, which you have seen a thousand times, and which, were it not for his sake, you would never care to look at: you entertain him speaking of these objects that have lost all interest for you, to which, at any other time, you would not give a thought: and this because your love for your friend, with your desire of giving him pleasure, lends novelty and interest to things with which you have been long since familiar." Thus too, in our case:—the Director has but to feel love for his penitents, and this spiritual and holy affection will hinder him from noticing the sameness in his several relations with them as he instructs,

* Jam vero si usitata, et parvulis congruentia, sæpe repetere fastidimus, congruamus eis per fraternum, paternum, maternumque amorem, et copulatis nobis cordi eorum etiam nova videbuntur. Tantum enim valet animi compatientis affectus, ut cum illi afficiuntur nobis loquentibus, et nos illis discentibus, habitemus in invicem: atque ita et illi quæ audiunt, quasi loquantur in nobis, et nos in illis discamus quodammodo, quæ docemus. Lib. de Catech. Rudib., c. 12.

reproves, advises, suggests remedies, tries new expedients; though he have done all this a hundred and a hundred times; nor will he be wearied with hearing and saying the same things even thousands and thousands of times, since these old things will borrow novelty and a savour of spirituality from the holy tenderness which he bears to them in his heart.

351. To sum up: it is but too true, that the fitting and steady exercise of this part of the sacred ministry presupposes that the Priest undertakes it with a heart inflamed with charity; for charity, as we learn from the Apostle, is kind, is patient, bears with all, endures everything, and makes all things sweet with its own inherent sweetness.* St. Ambrose was full of this tender charity, as we are told by Paulinus, his biographer. In hearing the confessions of sinners, he used to burst into tears of compassion, which forced the guilty persons themselves to weep, and made the holy Bishop appear as if he, no less than they, was overwhelmed with the burden of their offences.† St. Hugh, Bishop of Grenoble, is another instance of this charity. When hearing Confessions he wept so abundantly on account of the pity which he felt for the sins of others, that his penitents could not help bursting into tears. Walter Celesius relates that having been to Confession to the good Bishop in early life, the Saint poured on his head so copious a flood of tears, that they streamed in torrents down his cheeks. If the Director possess a mere spark of this charity, he need not be frightened of weariness at having always to listen to the same things, and at being obliged always to say the same things, because what we do out of love is ever new and ever pleasing.

352. But above all, let him take heed exceedingly, lest at any time he drive away from him any sinner, however badly disposed he may be, by harsh, and indeed I might say inhuman, treatment, such as angrily slamming the grate of the Confessional in his face, as some imprudent Priests have been known to do; or

* Caritas benigna est, patiens est, omnia suffert, omnia sustinet. I. Cor. xiij. 4.

† Quotiescumque illi aliquis, ad percipiendam pœnitentiam, lapsus suos confessus esset: ita flebat, ut et illum flere compelleret: videbatur etiam sibi cum jacent jacere. S. Paulinus. In Vitâ S. Ambrosii.

speaking to the penitent in rough and insulting language, saying to him, for instance, "Go away! you are a lost man" (as I have myself more than once heard Priests say): for this is not charity, but anger—not zeal, but pride. I have ever felt deeply impressed by what I have read in a letter which St. Dionysius the Areopagite, a disciple of St. Paul, wrote to a certain monk whose name was Demophilus. This monk had dismissed without absolution and with hard treatment some Priest or other, who, prostrate at his feet, had been accusing himself of his sins. After setting before his eyes the long-suffering of our most loving Saviour in seeking the lost sheep, and in bearing it back to the fold on His shoulders, the Saint rebukes the Religious in the following terms: "Not only hast thou felt no horror at rejecting one who came to implore thee to apply balm to his wounded spirit, but thou hast dared to reproach him with injurious words, calling him a wretch, and at length bidding him to go away along with his fellows!"* Then he adds these memorable words: "And, what may not be told without horror, after having been so grievously wanting in charity, thou hast entered the Holy Place and defiled it with thy presence!"† This stern rebuke, addressed by a saint of such authority to one who had harshly driven away a sinner, should teach Directors the greatness of such an evil, and make them guard themselves against the like excesses. If Confessors chance to meet with some person who is ill-disposed, they should endeavour in all charity to bring him to the proper dispositions. If the unhappy individual still remain impenitent, they must refuse absolution, of course, but in a proper manner, so as to show that this refusal results not from anger but from the necessity of the case, and that it costs Priests much to withhold absolution; at the same time manifesting all readiness to receive the person lovingly whenever he may wish to return repentant, contrite, and better disposed for the grace of the Sacrament. In a word,

* Ille quidem rogabat, seque medicinæ peccatorum causâ venisse fatebatur: tu autem non modo non exhorruisti, insuper et bonum sacerdotem maledictis vexasti, miserum eum appellans . . . et ad extremum: Exi, sacerdoti dixisti, cum tuis similibus. Epist. 8, Ad Demophilum.

† Quodque nefas est, in adyta ingressus es, et sancta sanctorum violasti.

Directors must put on the bowels of charity, for this will help them to exercise this sacred ministry not only with gentleness, but also as justice requires, and so as to avoid any kind of excess.

353. Lastly, some Priests knowing from experience that hearing confessions, especially for many hours consecutively, tasks their powers, tires their head, and wears out their strength, withdraw themselves by degrees from the weight of this burden, and finally shake off the yoke altogether if it be at all possible to do so. Confessors of this kind should take courage to undergo willingly the inconveniences of this toilsome ministry, from the thought of the labours, the endurance, the sufferings of our Blessed Redeemer, and of the sweat and blood that He spent as the price of our souls. Doing this, they will conceive an ardent zeal to take some share themselves in the divine work of saving souls; being assured that as nothing is dearer than this to the heart of Jesus, so nothing can render them more acceptable in His sight. Such holy zeal will inflame them with an ardour that will make them willing and ready to undergo every toil, to brave all the sufferings, to think nothing of all the inconveniences, which must necessarily be undergone in the exercise of this sacred ministry. They will do well further to reflect that though the body suffer somewhat from a long confinement in the Confessional, the spirit is much recruited: as, in the administration of the holy sacrament of Penance, every one of the virtues is brought into play. Thus charity may be practised in a very high degree; sometimes by instructing, sometimes by giving counsel: at one time by bringing back to the path of salvation persons who have gone astray, at another by guiding the devout along the road of perfection. We may exercise our zeal for God's honour by hindering people from offending the Divine Majesty. Mortification, too, is shown, by overcoming the repugnance which a ministry of its own nature so irksome must needs inspire. Humility, again, is exercised when we see in the falls of others what we ourselves would have been were it not for the grace of God. The rude and ignorant will try our patience, the weak will stir up our compassion, sinners will call out our loving-kindness. In a word, a Priest may become a saint by hearing confessions sooner than by any

other religious exercise. Directors should therefore keep an eye to these spiritual advantages, and be encouraged by the thought of them to bear generously with all the fatigues and all the inconveniences which are attendant on their ministry; even as tradesmen and artisans are stimulated by the prospect of gain to overcome weariness and to remain constant in their laborious occupations.

354. A certain Master in Theology, John de Nivelle by name, a truly apostolic man, wholly occupied in winning souls to God by his preaching and his assiduous attendance in the Confessional, was about to die, when a beggar man, whose nakedness was but half covered by his rags, presented himself at his monastery, and earnestly asked for him to hear his Confession. The lay-brothers, aware that the Priest was at the point of death, sent away the man, saying that the Father was not in a fit state to listen to him. The dying man having been informed of this, ordered them to recall the mendicant; and with the little breath that yet remained, heard his Confession, and gave him absolution, declaring afterwards, that not for a thousand crowns of gold would he have refused him the slight charity of listening to his tale: and a few hours later, he himself breathed his last. It happened to the same Religious, some years previously, that a famous physician offered to cure him, free of charge, of the gout which cruelly tormented him, and guaranteed a complete restoration to health, if only he would take good care of himself for a certain time. "For how long," replied the patient, "shall I be obliged to lie by in my cell?" "For three months at the very least," answered the doctor. "Three months!" exclaimed the astounded Religious, "I should not have the heart to spend even three weeks over the cure of this wretched carcass without gaining souls which cost Jesus Christ all His precious blood."* If the Director will but enkindle within his heart the like zeal, I can assure him that, far from feeling the labours of the Confessional irksome, he will find them, on the contrary, very light and agreeable.

* Th. Cantiprat. Apum., lib. ij. c. 34.

ARTICLE IX.

Eighth means of attaining to Christian Perfection.—Daily Examination of Conscience.

CHAPTER I.

THAT DAILY EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE IS A MOST IMPORTANT MEANS OF CHRISTIAN PERFECTION, IS SHOWN FROM THE AUTHORITY OF THE FATHERS OF THE CHURCH.

355. THERE are two kinds of Confession whereby a devout person may cancel the sins which sully his conscience: the first is Sacramental, and is made at the feet of a Confessor; the other is wholly secret, and takes place between God and the soul, to the exclusion of every other person; and this is called the Daily Examination of Conscience, because it is generally practised every day by such as aim at purity of heart and progress in perfection. In both these kinds of Confession, search after sin, and humble sorrow, with an efficacious purpose of amendment, are required. In both, we have to accuse ourselves of our sins: in the first, to the ears of the Priest, in the second, in the presence of God. If our repentance in this solitary accusation of ourselves reach to perfect contrition, both one and the other kind of confession avail to obtain pardon and to restore to the soul its former purity. There is, however, this difference, that when any one is guilty of grievous sin, he is under a grave obligation to make it known in Sacramental Confession, else he would fall back again under God's displeasure by his neglect of a most weighty divine commandment. But when any one is conscious of slighter faults only, it is still a matter of counsel to disclose them in sacramental confession, and even necessary, as we have seen above, if the person would aspire to perfection, in order that he may be able to gain that purity of con-

science which, more than any other thing, disposes us to the perfect love of God. This notwithstanding, the confession we make to God alone has certain advantages which sacramental confession does not possess: for we can make it in any place, at any hour, at any moment; in fact, whenever we choose: which is not the case with sacramental confession, where a Priest is needed as the minister, and a fixed place and time must be chosen. Having then in the foregoing Article spoken of sacramental confession, which we make to the ministers of holy Church, it will not be out of place to treat now of this other kind of confession, which, without the intervention of any minister, is made before God, and is none other than the daily examination of conscience. And we shall treat of this subject the more willingly, as it, too, is a most important means of acquiring purity of heart, and consequently of attaining to perfection. This will be shown in the present Chapter, from the authority of the holy Fathers, and in the following one, by intrinsic proofs.

356. St. Basil says: "At the close of each day, when all our labours, both of body and mind, are brought to an end, each one, before retiring to rest, should set himself to an attentive examination of his conscience, in order to discover the faults which he has committed during the past day."* St. Ephrem, a writer of great authority in the early Church, explains this by the parity of a merchant who, morning and night, balances his accounts, and, because he is anxious that his business should flourish, examines diligently what are his gains and what his losses. And thus should we also, says the Saint, if we desire to advance in Christian perfection, both morning and evening look into the state of our accounts, and examine into the spiritual traffic which we are carrying on with God.† Then coming down to particulars he writes: "At night-time, withdrawing into the closet of thy

* Completo jam die, omnique opere cum corporis, tum spiritûs etiam, absoluto, præclare fiet, si diligenter unusquisque antequam cubitum eat, cum animo suo conscientiam suam exquirat. Serm., i, De Institut. Monachor.

† Diebus singulis, vespere, et mane diligenter considera, quo pacto se habeat negotiatio tua, ac mercimonii ratio. Tom. iij., Serm. Ascetic. De Vitâ Religios.

heart, thou shouldst question thyself, saying, 'Have I this day offended my God in any one point? Have I spoken idle words? Have I through neglect or contempt omitted to do any good action? Have I wounded in any particular my neighbour's feelings? Has my tongue given way to any kind of detraction?' &c.* And when morning comes, examine again how thy business and thy spiritual merchandise have proceeded during the past night. 'Have I had any bad thoughts, have I been negligent in dwelling upon them?'" &c.† He finishes by saying, that if we discover any sin or failing, it must be blotted out by repentance, and washed away with tears of contrition.

357. Have you ever observed with what exactness and diligence the master of a house regulates his domestic concerns? Every day he calls in his steward, takes account of his expenditure, insisting upon an accurate statement of all; he examines diligently, to see whether the said expenditure has been superfluous or extravagant, or whether, on the contrary, it has been too limited and insufficient. And this he does in order that he may neither go beyond, nor yet fall below, what is necessary and suitable for the proper support of his family. In like manner should we act in regulating our own selves. In the little world which we all have within us, reason is the mistress that commands, the faculties of the soul and the senses of our body are the servants from whom it has to claim obedience and submission. Let then the reason summon the powers of the soul to give account daily of what they have been doing. Let it call on the understanding for an account of its thoughts, and examine whether these have been vain, proud, resentful, unchaste, contrary to brotherly love, and if they have wilfully or even carelessly dwelt on such objects. Let

* Vespere quidem ingressus cubiculum cordis tui, examina te ipsum, et dicito: Putasne hodie in aliquo Deum exacerbavi? Numquid verba otiosa protuli? Num per contemptum, negligentiamque peccavi? Num in re aliquâ fratrem irritavi? Num alicujus famam detractionibus laceravi? &c.

† Facto jam diluculo, rursus eadem tecum meditare, et dicito: Quomodo putas, ista mihi nox præteriit? Lucratus sum in eâ mercimonium meum? Numquid improbæ, et sordidæ cogitationes invaserunt me, atque illis libenter immoratus sum? &c.

it summon the will to give account of its affections, whether they have been sinful or imperfect, and whether or not it has in any manner consented thereunto. Let it strictly cross-question all the senses of the body. The eyes must be examined whether they have been over-inquisitive, immodest, or too free and wanton. The tongue must be questioned as to its words; have they been offensive, unchaste, angry, idle, contrary to charity? The ears, the touch, the taste, the hands, must be called to give an exact account of all they have done. Next, by a lively repentance we must correct whatever we shall discover to have been inordinate and sinful, and everything must be set in order anew by a firm and resolute purpose of amendment. By this daily search into our every action, the reason will be enabled to regulate all with justice and exactitude, and we shall make easy, rapid, and safe progress towards the perfection to which we are called. This comparison is borrowed entirely from St. John Chrysostom, who employs it in order to show the importance of this daily self-examination, and who exhorts us to the practice thereof.*

358. St. Gregory the Great says, that whoever fails to examine daily into all that he has done, said, and thought, is not at home with, and present to, himself, but lives an outside and chance life, and is consequently losing sight altogether of his perfection.† St. Bernard assures us that if we will but examine ourselves morning and night, and prescribe to ourselves, early and late, the rule of

* Idem facere oportet in peccatis, quod in pecuniarum sumptibus: statim cum surreximus a lecto, priusquam progrediamur in forum, vel priusquam aggrediamur opus vel privatum, vel publicum, vocato ministro, rationem sumptuum petimus, ut sciamus, quidnam male, quid bene expenderit. . . Faciamus igitur hoc et in operibus nostris, vocatâ conscientiâ nostrâ. Faciamus similiter rationem verborum, operum, cogitationum; et scrutemur, quid utiliter insumptum sit, et quid in perniciem nostram. Quis sermo male expensus in convicia, in sales, in turpiloquia: quæ concupiscentia oculorum in intemperantiam provocavit: quæ cogitatio cum damno nostro in opus prodierit, vel per manus, vel per linguam, vel per cogitationes ipsas. Serm. de Pœnit. et Conf.

† Quisque vitæ suæ custodiam negligit discutere, quæ agit, quæ loquitur, quæ cogitat, aut despicit, aut nescit; coram se ipse non ambulat: quia qualis sit in suis moribus, vel in actibus, ignorat. Nec sibimetipsi præsens est, qui semetipsum quotidie exquirere, aut cognoscere solicitus non est. Homil. 4. In Ezech.

our life, we shall never fall into any serious fault.* And not to weary our kind reader by multiplied and lengthy texts which might easily be accumulated, I will only add that St. Dorotheus, though one of the early Fathers, while recommending examination of conscience as a most sure means of keeping the soul pure and unblemished, says, that this lesson had been handed down at his time from his forefathers and their predecessors. It is therefore unquestionable that from the very first ages of the Church, the saints looked upon daily examination of conscience as a most powerful means of speedily attaining to purity of heart, and through this to Christian perfection.†

359. Nor have the saints recommended this Examination of Conscience by their teachings only, they have further encouraged us to the assiduous practice of the same by their example; for, indeed, it would be difficult to point out a single holy Confessor who has not made use of it as of a ladder by which to climb to the summit of perfection. St. Ignatius of Loyola,‡ not content with examining his conscience twice a day, conformably with the instructions of the ancient Fathers, never let a single hour pass by without recollecting himself, and searching minutely into all his thoughts, words, and actions, during that brief space of time; repenting of every slight imperfection which the pure eye of his mind could discover, and renewing the spirit within him by a freshly formed purpose of spending the coming hour in a more faultless manner. He was unable even to understand how any one could aspire to sanctity and not keep constant watch over his heart by examining all its movements. Hence, one who had been a close observer of the course of his whole life, was able to say that the life of St. Ignatius was one uninterrupted examination of

* Mane præteritæ noctis fac a temetipso exactionem, et venturæ diei tibi indicito cautionem. Sic districto nequaquam tibi aliquando lascivire vacabit. Ad Fratres de Monte Dei.

† Quo pacto per singulos dies nosmetipsos purgare, et propemodum expiare debeamus, exactissime docuerunt majores, et patres nostri: nempe ut vesperi sedulo quisque perquirat, et investiget, quomodo pertransierit diem illum. Rursus mane examinet, quomodo exegerit noctem illam: et pœnitentiam agat, et resipiscat cum Deo. Doct. 11, de Vitâ Recte et Pie Instituendâ.

‡ Nolarci, Vita di S. Ignazio, cap. 24.

conscience. It will not be foreign to the present subject if I relate an expression of wonder on the part of the Saint which renders him worthy of greater wonder on our part; for having one day chanced to meet one of the Fathers of the Society, he asked him familiarly how often he had entered into himself for the purpose of self-examination up to that hour. "Seven times," replied the latter. "Ah, me! so seldom!" answered the Saint, quite astonished. And it was not yet evening when this happened; but some hours of the day were still to come. St. Francis Borgia was also in the habit of taking account of himself at least once in every hour: indeed, St. Dorotheus recommends the practice to all devout persons as most advantageous to the soul.* We may hence infer, that as the saints have so earnestly inculcated, and so diligently practised, this daily Examination o Conscience, it must needs be a most necessary means for the attainment of perfection.

CHAPTER II.

REASONS WHICH MADE THE SAINTS LOOK UPON DAILY EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE AS MOST NECESSARY.

360. THE principal reason why the saints so earnestly exhort us to watch over our every action by means of daily self examination, is based on the corruption of our nature, proceeding from the sin of our first parent, on account of which the same failings ever tend to shoot forth anew within us, the same sins to reappear, and the same passions to rage within our hearts. Hence it is necessary to observe, at least once a day, what poisonous weeds have sprung up within our hearts, in order that we may prune them with the knife of a true contrition. How unwise would not that gardener be, who, having once cleared the ground of

* Sane cum admodum delinquamus, obliviscamurque delicta nostra, opus est nobis ad horas diligenti examinatione: quo pacto scilicet ambulemus id momenti, et temporis, et in quo delinquimus. Doct. 11, Supradict.

weeds, were never to do so more! seeing that the soil will always begin again and again to put forth useless and noxious plants which stifle the growth of such as have value. A vine-dresser would surely be thought to have lost his senses, and very justly too, if, after having once removed from the trees and vines all superfluous branches and tendrils, he were never again to perform the like operation; for vines and trees are ever putting forth a fresh and undue luxuriance of branches, shoots, and leaves. No less folly would it be in a Christian, if having by some one good Confession uprooted in his heart the poisonous growth of his faults, and pruned the wasteful luxuriance of his feelings, he were to neglect to do the same thing day by day, through a diligent Examination of Conscience: being fully aware, as he must be, that some evil weed or other springs up every day; that some branch of sin puts forth its shoots; that some one passion awakens; and that without constant pruning the beauteous garden of the soul would soon become a hideous tangle of sin. But let us hear St. Bernard on this point: "Who is there," he says, "in this world, who has so perfectly cut away from within himself all vain and superfluous attachments, as to have no need to cut or prune away anything more? Believe me, the evils that have been cut down will put forth new shoots; after having been driven forth, they will surely come back; when quenched they will once more burst into flame; and though now they are lying dormant, soon will they awake anew. Hence, it avails little to have used the pruning-knife once; we must use it often, and, inasmuch as may be possible, never let it out of our hands; because, unless we want to hoodwink and blind ourselves, we shall always be finding something in ourselves that needs cutting away."* The same Saint then adds: "As long as you dwell in this mortal body, whatever may be your strivings after progress in spiritual life, you deceive yourself if you fancy that your lusts and vices are dead, and not

* Quis enim ita ad unguem omnia a se superflua resecavit, ut nihil se habere putet putatione dignum? Credite mihi, et putata repullulant, et effugata redeunt, et reaccenduntur extincta, et sopita denuo excitantur. Parum est ergo semel putâsse, sæpe putandum est, imo, si fieri potest, semper: quia semper, quod putari oporteat, si non dissimulas, invenis. In Cantic., Serm. 52.

rather forcibly kept under for the time."* Never therefore must we let ourselves be lulled into a false security, but we must keep a daily watch and ward over our vicious tendencies by frequently examining our conscience, and must strike them down, when they make their appearance, by repeated blows of contrition.

361. If a King were to learn for certain that within the limits of his realm his foes were lurking, hidden among the woods and thickets, he certainly would not fail to pursue them vigorously. And when he had found them, think you that he would let them remain there at large? Undoubtedly not. After having tracked them out with the greatest diligence, he would put them all to the sword, and make a wholesale slaughter of them, as soon as they were fully discovered. "Now, remember," St. Bernard continues, "that you have within you an enemy whom you may overcome and subdue, but whom you cannot exterminate; whether you will it or not, this enemy will ever be living within you, and will ever carry on an implacable war against you. Who, then, is this great, undying enemy, or rather, who are these many enemies who can only die when you die yourself? I answer: your own passions, your own vices, and the weaknesses which your passions and vices beget."† Seek them out, then, every day by the Examination of Conscience; and having, through a diligent search, discovered them, slay them with the sword of a true sorrow; hew them down by the earnestness of your resolve; so that they may be left on the field, not indeed dead, as that cannot be, but so wounded and disabled that they may no longer be able to hinder your progress in the way of perfection.

362. Tell me, pray, have you ever heard of a shipwright who succeeded in framing a ship so strongly that neither the beating of the waves nor the violence of the winds could ever spring the slightest leak? You answer, that this would be impossible, because a ship is made up of so many beams, so many planks, so many joints, all fastened together, that, hourly beaten as it is by the buffeting of wind and water, it must sooner or later loosen

* Quantumlibet in hoc corpore manens profeceris, erras, si vitia putas emortua, et non magis suppressa.

† Intra fines tuos habitat Jebusæus: subjugari potest, sed non exterminari.

some of them. What then can be done to hinder the poor vessel which is constantly taking in water, drop by drop though it may be, from eventually sinking, and being swamped in the midst of the ocean? There is but one remedy: it is to work the pumps regularly, in order to prevent the water accumulating in the hold. Now man, in the ocean of misery in which we are constrained to sail, is very like a tempest-tost ship, being made up, so to speak, of enfeebled powers, of weak senses, of passions always ready to betray; nor is it to be expected that, amid the shock of so many temptations, having to encounter so many occasions and dangers of evil, he will not leave some small opening by which venial sins, at least, and trivial faults will find their way into the soul, and by their accumulation bring about in course of time that shipwreck which we call mortal sin; or, if not this, at all events hinder him from reaching in safety the port which he is desirous of making,—I mean, from attaining perfection. What then is to be done to hinder this dreadful misfortune from coming upon us by slow degrees? What, but daily to empty the conscience of the faults we have committed, by a serious examination of ourselves? to cast them out by contrition, to close up the rifts through which they find an entrance, by our firm purposes and constantly-renewed resolutions to amend? This simile I have borrowed from St. Augustine.* "The troubled waters of venial offences," says the holy Doctor, "rise daily in the hold of our hearts; whoever, then, wishes not to perish, let him empty it out every day, as sailors do the hold of a ship, by a careful and contrite examination of conscience."

363. From this argument another may be deduced which proves to demonstration that it is idle to dream of attaining Christian perfection without examining our conscience; for, if what we have heretofore proved be true; if, that is, without a daily scrutiny of our hearts we cannot rid ourselves of the vices, sins, and failings to which we are so prone, it is equally demonstrable that without

* Non contemnantur vel minora (scilicet peccata). Per angustas rimulas navis insudat aqua, impletur sentina: si contemnatur sentina, mergitur navis. Sed non cessatur a nautis: ambulant manus, ambulant, ut quotidie sentinæ exhauriantur. Sic et tuæ manus ambulent, ut quotidie sentinæ. Hom. 42, Lib. Quinquag. Homil., c. 9.

this examination, virtue can have no growth whatever within us; still less can the divine flower of charity blossom forth in our hearts. In order that the grain may grow in the field, the ground must first of all be cleared of briars and brambles: we must first cart away the stones which encumber the soil, otherwise, as we read in the Gospel parable, the thorns will choke the seed, and the stones will deprive it of the moisture necessary.* So too, the chosen seed of virtue cannot spring up and flourish in the soil of our hearts, unless they be first cleared of the roots of vices and of bad passions; unless they be previously cleansed of those daily faults, which, little by little, harden it and make it as impervious as a rock. All this is admirably expressed in the sweet language of St. Bernard. "Virtue," he writes, "cannot grow in the company of vice. If the one is to flourish, the other must perish. Clear away, then, what is superfluous and vicious, and that which is wholesome and virtuous will at once spring up. Whatever you withhold from your lusts will turn to the profit and advantage of your spiritual life." "Therefore," concludes the holy Doctor, "let us take heed to cut down by a diligent self-examination the noxious growth of faults, vices, and defects, if we wish to see the flowers of every virtue bloom forth in the garden of our souls."†

364. St. Augustine, treating especially of charity, which, as we have so frequently said, is the very sap of our perfection, states positively, that it will increase in the measure of our efforts to keep down the lusts of our disorderly passions, and that charity will be perfect in him who has entirely mortified and extinguished his selfish lusts.‡ As a vessel full of water will gradually become full of air when the liquid is being drawn off, and, when all the water is emptied out, will contain nothing else but air; so, and much more, says St. Augustine, will our hearts fill with divine love in proportion as they are emptied of selfish desires, and then only

* Et aliud cecidit super petram. Natum aruit, quia non habebat humorem. Luc. viij.

† Non potest virtus pariter crescere. Ergo ut illa vigeat, ista crescere non s natur. Tolle superflua, ut salubria surgant. Utilitati accedit quidquid cupiditati demis. Demus operam putationi. Serm. 48, In Cant.

‡ Augmentum enim caritatis est diminutio cupiditatis; perfectio vero, nulla cupiditas. Lib. 83, qq.

will they be full of love when they are perfectly emptied of every disorderly inclination. St. Paul accounts for this in these words: "The end of all the commandments"—and by strict consequence, the crowning of the edifice of our perfection—"is charity." But this flower of paradise blooms only in pure hearts, in consciences cleansed from all evil lusts.* Now, to bring the heart to this stainless purity, no means can be more effectual than the frequent use of self-examination; than an exact care to cleanse it of its defilements by sorrow for our faults, to provide against future stains by good purposes, and never to let a day pass without thus cultivating the soul. He, then, who desires to see the red rose of charity, the white lilies of purity, the purple violet of humility and penance, indeed the flowers of every virtue, blossoming in his heart, must apply himself frequently to this holy exercise, and thus his soul will become perfect, lovely, and beautiful to behold, and the King of Heaven will come down to take His pleasure in it as in a Paradise of delights.

365. It will appear to no one an extraordinary matter to set apart a few minutes daily for examining and purifying our heart, if he calls to mind that the sages of old, pagan though they were, thought that this daily self-examination was necessary for the bettering of their life, and made use of it for that purpose. Pythagoras prescribes it to his disciples, many of whom were in the habit of searching into themselves regularly every evening. Cicero tells us of himself, that always at the close of each day he called himself to account for everything that he had spoken, heard, and done during the whole course of that day.† Seneca tells us that every night he sat thus in judgment over his own actions. "Each night," he writes, "when the lamp is put out in my chamber, and my wife, aware of my custom, keeps silence, I examine into the whole course of the past day. I think over all I have said and done, concealing nothing from myself, passing over nothing. If I discover anything amiss, I say to

* Finis præcepti est caritas de corde puro, et conscientiâ bonâ, et fide non fictâ. 1 Tim. i. 5.

† Pythagoreorum more, exercendæ memoriæ gratiâ, quid quotidie dixerim, audîerim, egerim, commemoro vesperi. De Senect.

myself, 'I forgive thee this time, but do so no more.'"* Now, if heathens, out of the desire they had for wisdom, made daily use of this self-examination, how much rather should it not be practised by Christians out of a desire of becoming pleasing to God by cleanness of heart, of attaining supernatural perfection, and of arriving at the possession of those surpassing good things which are in store for the perfect beyond the stars.

366. I may allege a further reason, which, as it escaped the sages of old, should be better known to us who are gifted with the light of faith. It is this: that by frequently and searchingly looking into ourselves, not in a superficial manner, but with inward compunction of spirit, we escape the severe and rigorous judgment that otherwise awaits us before the tribunal of God; for, as St. Paul says, *If we judge ourselves we shall not be judged.*† Cornelius à Lapide applies these words to our subject in this very sense, and in the following terms:—"If we examine and search into our conscience, submitting it to a rigorous trial, and if, when we discover any sins, we wash them away with tears of contrition, we shall not be judged by God; in other words, we shall escape punishment at His awful judgment."‡

367. Such being the case, the reader will do well to reflect on the terrors of God's judgment-day, on the searching examination which will then be made into his faults; to think how inexorable the Judge will show Himself; how severe the punishment which will then be awarded by an irrevocable sentence: he may then be quite sure that he will feel glad to examine his conscience, not only once, but several times a day, in order to escape so awful a judgment. A Religious of godly life appeared after his death, clad in sable garb, with a downcast and melancholy countenance, to

* Utor hâc potestate, et quotidie apud me causam dico. Cum ablatum est e conspectu lumen, et conticuit uxor, moris jam mei conscia, totum diem mecum scrutor; facta, et dicta remetior. Nihil mihi abscondo: nihil transeo. Quare enim quidquam ex erroribus meis timeam, cum possim mihi ipsi dicere: Vide istud amplius facias: nunc tibi ignosco. De Irâ.

† Quod si nosmetipsos dijudicaremus, non utique judicaremur. 1 Cor. xj. 31.

‡ *Quod si nosmetipsos dijudicaremus*, probaremus, examinaremus, discuteremus, ut si quid peccati inveniamus, illud contritione, et confessione expiemur: *non utique judicaremur*, non in judicio divino puniremur.

one of his brethren, a former friend of his. His friend asked him why he appeared in such a mournful aspect. The dead man answered, "It is beyond belief! it is beyond belief!"* "But what," replied the friend, "what is it that is beyond belief?" "It is," rejoined the dead man, "the rigour of God's judgment, and the severity of His chastisements."† At these words he vanished, leaving his friend more dead than alive from very terror.‡

368. It pleased God to give a specimen of the rigour of the divine judgment to St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi during her life time, in order that her example might inspire us with a wholesome dread.§ Having one evening knelt down to her usual Examination of Conscience, she was suddenly rapt in ecstasy and borne up to God's presence. Then our Lord, with a beam of His most pure light, penetrated her with such a sense of the malice of each of her faults, that those who heard her make her Examination aloud, while the ecstasy lasted, were struck with horror no less than herself. The first fault she mentioned was having omitted, on awaking in the morning, to direct her earliest thoughts to God, being busy with the care of calling up the sisters, in order that they might get ready to praise God, as she was fearful lest she might be late. This omission, which many of us would doubtless account an act of holy zeal, appeared so heinous to the Saint, that she implored God's mercy, declaring meanwhile that she was unworthy of it, and deserving of a thousand hells. Next she accused herself that, while standing in Choir, instead of being wholly absorbed in God's praise, she had felt some annoyance at seeing the prescribed inclinations of the head and other ceremonies omitted. Here again she craved mercy for what we should consider zeal for God's honour. She then accused herself, as she had already done in Confession that very day, of having rebuked one of her novices with an expression not quite gentle and sweet. She besought God to pardon her, and in order to obtain forgive-

* Nemo credit, nemo credit, nemo credit.
† Quam districte judicet Deus, et quam severe puniat.
‡ Doct. Jac. de Paradiso. In Lib. de Pecc. Mental. et Criminal.
§ Vincenzo Puccini. Nella sua Vita, cap. 76.

ness, pleaded the merits of His most bitter Passion. That same day, while conversing at the *grille* with an aunt of hers, she had been rapt in ecstasy, and carried forcibly from herself by the power of God. Feeling the inward motion of God's spirit, she had signalled to the nuns to take her away, lest she should be seen in this condition by a secular person. The nuns, however, did not understand what she wished to convey by these signals, so that she fell into ecstasy in public, without being able to help it. Now, for this, in which none of us could discover even the shadow of a fault, she blamed herself bitterly, calling it great hypocrisy, since she had appeared better than she was,—craving God's pardon, and protesting that if He cast her into hell, she deserved to be under the feet of Judas. She continued to accuse herself of such slight defects as these, with the like expressions of contrition, and at length concluded in words which would befit a repentant adulterer or murderer, whom the enormity of his crimes had well-nigh driven to despair of God's mercy, saying, "O God, as I have so often offended Thee to-day, I will not add to my other sins the crowning offence of despairing of Thy mercy. Full well I know, O Lord, that I am unworthy of pardon, but the blood that Thou hast shed for me emboldens me to look for forgiveness." On another occasion God showed the Saint, while she was in an ecstasy, all the sins she had committed in her past life. On beholding them, she sobbed bitterly, and exclaimed, "Willingly would I go to hell, if only by so doing I could bring about that I had never offended Thee." Yet it is well known how blamelessly this Saint had lived, even from her tenderest years. So much does the weight of our faults increase when God takes upon Himself the examination of them, and shows them to the soul as they really are in themselves. What then will be our state at God's judgment-seat, on beholding our crimes in a light much clearer and far more penetrating than that in which this holy virgin saw her slight failings? Truly, disembodied souls see things in a far different light from that in which we behold the same while yet in the bonds of the flesh! What dread, what horror will one day be ours! I am sure that if the sight of our faults could cause death in the next world, we should

die a thousand times from sheer fright. But what remedy is there for this? None other than reliance on the counsel of the Apostle: to sit in judgment now upon ourselves. *If we judge ourselves we shall not be judged.** None other than to call our consciences to account at least once in the day; to search into various movements; to examine them all with a critical and observant eye; and on discovering anything amiss, to blot it out by acts of lively contrition and firm purposes of amendment; bearing in mind that, as St. Augustine says, "God loves to pardon those who confess their faults to Him with lowly repentance, and forbears from judging those severely who, with a contrite heart, do judgment upon themselves."†

CHAPTER III.

THE MANNER OF MAKING THE DAILY EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE EXPLAINED.

369. ACCORDING to the plan laid down by St. Ignatius in the book of his Spiritual Exercises, this devout practice should consist of five parts. In the first place, we put ourselves in the presence of God by an act of faith and profound adoration, and give Him thanks for all the favours we have received from the divine bounty, but especially on that particular day. St. Bernard warns us to be very much indeed on our guard not to be backward in giving God the thanks so due for the benefits which He imparts to us: since gratitude dictates that we should duly render thanks to the "giver of all good gifts," for every favour, whether ordinary, or great, or small.‡ Now, the time of Examination of Conscience

* Si nosmetipsos dijudicaremus, non utique judicaremur.

† Amat Deus confitentibus parcere, et eos qui se judicant, non judicare.

‡ Disce in referendo gratiam non esse tardus, aut segnis. Disce ad singula dona gratias agere. Diligenter considera, quæ tibi apponuntur, ut nulla videlicet Dei dona, debitâ gratiarum actione frustrentur; non grandia, non mediocria, non pusilla. Serm. 51, In Cant.

is most suitable for this purpose, as then it is that the soul strikes a balance between what it has received from God, and the return it has made to Him. So much the more, too, as gratitude for favours received disposes the soul to that sorrow which will have to follow upon the thought of the ingratitude we have shown by our sins.

370. In the second place, we must ask God to give us light to know our sins and negligences. This prayer is most necessary, for, as St. Gregory the Great says, "Self-love deludes us and blinds the eye of our mind so that we fail to perceive our faults, or they appear much less grievous than they really are, and thus we make less account of them than we ought."* Hence it is of the utmost importance for us to ask God to dispel the darkness which self-love sheds over our minds, that, the eye of our soul being cleared and purified, we may be able to discover all our sins, penetrate their malice, and estimate it at its proper weight. The more so because, failing this self-knowledge, we cannot have a true repentance for our sins; since as the same holy Pope remarks, "God does not bestow the grace of compunction until He have previously made us conscious of the enormity of our faults."†

371. In the third place, we must make a diligent search into all the sins or imperfections into which we have fallen during the past day or during the preceding night. "Set up a tribunal within thyself," says St. Augustine, "and judge the cause of the life thou hast this day led. Let thy thoughts go in search of thy sins, and let them accuse thee before God. Let thy conscience stand as witness against thee. Let the fear and love of God be the holy executioners to slay thy sins with the sword of repentance."‡ Very different from the judgments of earthly tribunals,

* Multa sunt peccata, quæ committimus: sed idcirco gravia nobis non videntur, quia privato nos amore diligentes, clausis nobis oculis in nostrâ deceptione blandimur. Et scimus, quia vehementer claudit oculum cordis privatus amor. Hom. 4. In Ezech.

† Compunctionis gratia menti non infunditur, nisi prius ipsa ei peccati magnitudo monstretur. Lib. v. in 1 Reg., cap. 11.

‡ Ascendat homo adversum se tribunal mentis suæ. . . . Et constituto in corde judicio, adsit accu atrix cognitio, testis conscientia, carnifex timor. Hom. 40, ex. Quinquag. Homil., cap. 6.

—which usually end with the condemnation of the accused,—this inward judgment will secure thy acquittal and the pardon of thy sins. "But to attain this end," says St. John Chrysostom, "thou must proceed against thyself with rigour and exactness. Thou must carefully examine all the thoughts that have passed through thy mind, all the words that have issued from thy mouth, and all the actions that thou hast done; nor will any time be better suited for doing this than at eventide, when thou art about to lay thee down upon thy bed."* "But remember," continues the Saint, "that this examination is not to be made upon thy life in the gross, passing over slight faults as of little moment; for thou shouldst take strict account even of these, as doing this thou wilt guard thyself from more grievous faults."† This latter caution should be borne in mind especially by such as are somewhat advanced in the way of perfection, and who may be looked upon as already being among the proficients, or the perfect; for in such persons every fault increases in magnitude; and, as St. Isidore observes, that which might be termed a slight fault and of small moment in a mere beginner, can no longer be called a small sin in one who has advanced on the way to perfection; in such a one every fault should be accounted as serious.‡ If a boy at school be guilty of a barbarism in language, he is to be pitied; but if his teacher be guilty of the same, he deserves no compassion: because he is bound to be perfect, or nearly perfect, in his own profession. The same holds good of spiritual persons. Hence, they should proceed in their self-examination with attentive and all-

* Quando accubueris supra stratum tuum, et neminem infestum patieris, antequam veniat tibi somnus, profer in medium codicem conscientiam tuam; et reminiscere peccata tua, si quid in verbo, seu in facto, seu in cogitatione peccasti. In Ps. l., Hom. 2.

† Itaque lectum, atque quietem petiturus, hoc judicium ineas. . . . Nec res parvas contemne; sed magnas etiam earum rationes repete. Hoc modo magna facilius evitabis delicta. Hom. 43 in Matth.

‡ Peccata, quæ incipientibus levia sunt, perfectis viris gravia reputantur: tanto enim majus cognoscitur esse peccatum, quanto major, qui peccat, habetur. Crescit enim delicti cumulus juxta ordinem meritorum: et sæpe quod minoribus ignoscitur, majoribus imputatur. Lib. xxj. De Summo Bono, cap. 18.

observing eye, taking account of every defect; and, as St. Isidore says, considering that nothing can be of slight importance in the state to which they have attained.

372. In the fourth place, the Examination must be followed by an act of sorrow and contrition for the sins we have committed. "If thou find," says St. John Chrysostom, "that in the course of the day thou hast done some good action, give loving thanks to God; for by His gift hast thou been able to do it. But if thou discover faults and sins, blot them out with penitential tears."* This sorrow must, as far as possible, be heartfelt, and full of inward confusion and humility, as we have seen above while treating of Confession. The offender, under the sense of his faults and of his infidelity to God, must present himself in the sight of the Almighty as a perverse and ungrateful son would present himself before an affectionate father, and with heartfelt confusion should say in the words of St. Bernard, "How can I be so bold as to raise my eyes to the countenance of so kind a Father, being, as I am, so undutiful a son? I blush for having done things unworthy of my station, for having proved myself the degenerate son of so good a Father. Let rivers of tears flow down from mine eyes; let my face be covered with confusion, my countenance redden with shame, and my soul be overshadowed with deep humiliation."† The reader may be sure that the more this sorrow is humble and sincere, the more will it avail to purge the soul of all defilement.

373. The saints further counsel a devout person who discovers on examination some notable defect, to impose some penance upon himself in reparation of the fault he has committed, and as a precaution against future relapses. St. John Chrysostom says, "Let thy mind and thy thoughts sit in judgment over thy soul and

* Expendimus diem, O anima. Quid boni fecimus? Quid mali operati sumus? Si quid boni fecisti gratias age Deo: si quid mali, de cetero ne facias, et reminiscens peccatorum tuorum, effunde lacrymas; et poteris in lectulo tuo positus ea delere. In Ps. l., Hom. 2.

† Quânam fronte attollo jam oculos ad vultum patris tam boni tam malus filius? pudet indigna gessisse genere meo: pudet tanto patri vixisse degenerem. Exitus aquarum deducite oculi mei: operiat confusio faciem meam: vultum meum pudor suffundat, occupetque caligo. Serm. 16. In Cant.

conscience. Look into thy doings, cast out all thy faults, and to each of them assign a fitting chastisement and a proportionate penance."* In connection with this subject, Theodoret relates,† that a certain monk, Eusebius by name, happened during the reading of the Holy Gospel, to allow his eyes and mind to wander and dwell upon some peasants who were at work in the neighbouring fields. On recalling this negligence in his Examination of Conscience, he imposed on himself, for the fault he had committed the penance, not only of never looking at the field that had been the guilty occasion of his distraction, but of never again raising his eyes to heaven. But having marked out for himself a straight path, just broad enough to admit of passage, he always went by it to the chapel, and returned by it to his cell, without ever setting foot outside that narrow alley. And fearing lest, by raising his head, he might accidentally glance at the objects which he had forbidden his eyes to look upon,—what did he do, but fix an iron girdle around his loins, and an iron collar round his neck, and having fastened both together with a short chain, he was thus forced to remain always with his head bent down towards the ground, so as to be quite unable to see either the fields or the sky. Theodoret ends his narrative by observing, that in punishment of this curiosity and distraction, the monk persevered in his great mortification during the forty years that he survived.‡

374. I have not mentioned this fact because I hold the opinion that such extraordinary penances are to be imitated, but only to show that it was ever the custom of God's saints to impose upon themselves some mortification in punishment for the faults into which they happen to fall. Of course, in the use of such penances, each one has to consult his bodily and spiritual strength, and to choose, by the counsel of his Director, such as may, without unduly tasking his powers, help to restrain and deter him from

* Sedeat mens, atque cogitatio tua, judex in animam, atque conscientiam tuam. Educas omnia delicta tua in medium. Scrutare, quæ animo commisisti: et pone dignas singulorum pœnas. Hom. 43 in Matth.

† Hist. Eccles., cap. 4.

‡ Has ipse de se exegit pœnas, quod illos esset contemplatus agricolas: continuavitque totos quadraginta annos, quibus postea vixit.

falling anew. St. John Chrysostom suggests many such discreet penances; as, for instance, for the faults of the tongue, to recite some prayers; for unguarded looks, to give some alms, or observe some fast; for foolish expenditure, the compensation of a greater parsimony.* And elsewhere, he advises the use of stripes in chastisement of our faults, assuring us that far from dying under this infliction, we shall be helped to escape death. Such was the practice of St. Mary Magdalen de' Pazzi, who, after bewailing her faults in the ecstasy we have so lately mentioned, withdrew into a cell apart, and there tore her body with a frightful discipline.† Should it happen, however, that any one find himself unable to inflict stripes upon himself on each occasion, on account of the frequency of his falls, he may, at least, in his usual disciplines, add some few additional strokes, in proportion to the faults which he may have committed. If unable to fast, he may deny himself somewhat at his accustomed meals in punishment of his transgressions: he may mortify his unbridled tongue by making with it the sign of the cross so many times upon the floor: he may accompany his prayers with the mortification of reciting them with his hands under his knees, or with his arms outstretched in the form of a cross; and such other penances according as the devotion and compunction of each one may suggest.

375. In the fifth place, we must make a firm purpose not to offend God any more. This purpose, as St. John Chrysostom—frequently quoted by us—observes, should be so efficacious as to instil into the soul a holy fear of ever again relapsing into sin; so that, like a guilty person who has been severely rebuked, we may not venture to lift up our heads for shame, but ever bear in mind the reproach administered.‡ In order to be of any real use,

* Pro semel male insumptis aliud reponamus lucrum: pro verbis temere prolatis sanctas preces: pro visu intemperate facto eleemosynas, jejunia. In Serm. de Pœnit. et Confess.

† Deinde si causam suam dicere non possit (nempe conscientia), sed balbutiat, atque stupescat: quasi superbam ancillam, et de fornicatione corruptam, cæde verberibus, et flagellis dilania. Hoc judicium quotidie sibi diligenter constituatur. . . . Non enim morietur percussa, sed mortem effugiet. Homil. 43 in Matth.

‡ Increpemus mentem, et conscientiam tanto impetu, ut non audeat ultra exsurgere, et in idem peccatorum profundum nos inducere, memor vespertinæ plagæ. Serm. de Pœnit. et Confess.

this purpose of amendment must descend to particulars. That passion or disordered affection which has led you astray, is to be put to the torture; that is the one to be racked with contrition; that is precisely the one you must strike down by good resolves, so that it may no more venture to assail you, or may, at least, attack you with diminished strength. For it is by particular, and not by general, resolutions, that our vices are usually overcome, as, by taking in hand sometimes this and sometimes that one of our faults, we strengthen the will in a generous and constant resistance, first to one and then to another of our failings, and thus, at length, by slow degrees, we get rid of each and all of them.

376. And furthermore we must look into the origin of our faults; we must go down to the depths of our soul, to find out the root of these evil weeds, so as to be able to pull them up out of our hearts. What use is there in shaking off the leaves, or clipping the branches of a tree that never bears fruit, and does nothing but cast a hurtful shade upon the ground? Unless the root be destroyed, all avails nothing; the tree will soon be covered with foliage in greater luxuriance than ever. Thus too, our resolutions will be to little purpose so long as we cut not off the occasions and origin of our faults: and our defects will continually return to defile our souls, however much we may resolve not to be guilty of them in future. Lastly, the Examination of Conscience should end with an Our Father and Hail Mary, and a fervent prayer to God for grace never to offend Him more, and to carry out in practice all that we have promised to do: remembering that we can do nothing without the help of God.

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE PARTICULAR EXAMINATION. ITS ADVANTAGES FOR THE ATTAINING OF PERFECTION. THE METHOD OF MAKING IT.

377. It is impossible to overcome all at once the passions which domineer over us: to uproot by one effort all the vices implanted in our souls; and at one and the same time to bring about a complete amendment of our conduct. Hence Cassian, with all the other masters of the spiritual life, teaches that in correcting our evil habits, we must proceed methodically. We must specially keep in view our predominant passion or vice, and be determined to fight against it with all the might of our soul.* Against this vice or passion, continues Cassian, as against our chief enemy, we must use all our weapons; that is, all our meditations, our good resolutions, our prayers, our fasts, our tears: all our efforts, in short, in order to conquer it, to beat it down, and take it by storm.† Now, what is all this but to make the Particular Examination of which we are now speaking; since this consists in nothing else than discovering what is our predominant passion, and what the faults to which we are most liable, and then setting to work to uproot them, by particular examinations and special pious devices, as we are now going to show.

378. As soon as we shall have succeeded in overcoming some one passion, or in correcting ourselves of some particular fault, we should take another, and then another, in hand; thus, little by little, this spiritual industry will help us to ascend to the height of perfection. The top of a high tower is not reached by means

* Adversus vitia arripienda sunt prælia, ut unusquisque vitium, quo maxime infestatur, explorans, adversus illud arripiat principale certamen, omnem curam mentis, ac solicitudinem erga illius impugnationem, observationemque defigens. Collat. v., cap. 24.

† Adversus illud quotidiana jejuniorum dirigens spicula: contra illud cunctis momentis cordis suspiria, crebraque gemituum tela contorquens, adversus illud vigiliarum labores, ac meditationes sui cordis intendens, indesinenter quoque orationum ad Deum fletus fundens, et impugnationis suæ extinctionem ab illo specialiter, et jugiter poscens. *Ibid.*

of wings, but by means of steps. When any one wishes to ascend to the top, he takes the first step of the staircase, beginning to leave the ground below him and to approach the summit. He then takes the second, the third, the fourth step, and so on; and the more he increases his distance from the level ground, the more he nears the lofty summit; and the higher he mounts—the further continually he leaves behind him the base of the tower—the more does he approach the top of the building. Thus too, may we, by means of the Particular Examination, rid ourselves this month of one sin, in the next subdue some passion, and, after six months' striving, uproot altogether some vicious habit; proceeding further and further from the low and grovelling state of the imperfect, and approaching nearer and nearer to the summit of perfection. This comparison is borrowed from St. John Chrysostom, who perceives a figure of this gradual advance in perfection (by means of the correction of some fault and the acquirement of some virtue) in the well-known ladder of Jacob's dream, which reached from earth to heaven; for we too, by the steps of progressive improvement, mount up towards Paradise.*

379. And, what is truly admirable, even the pagan philosophers—whether for our instruction or confusion I hardly know—have adopted practices similar to those which I am now explaining, with a view to their own amendment. Listen to what Plutarch relates of himself: "Being a lover of meekness no less than of wisdom, I determined within myself to spend some days without yielding to anger; just as I might have bound myself to abstain from drunkenness and wine, as is the custom in certain feasts, where the use of this drink is forbidden. I next continued to exert special efforts for one or two months, and made short trials of my strength. Thus, in course of time, I came to bear with greater troubles and annoyances, being able to maintain my mastery over myself, so as to remain calm, gentle, and devoid of

* Vitia nostra recensentes, ea tempore corrigamus; et hoc mense unum, alio aliud, et ita subsequenter meliores efficiamur. Sic enim tamquam per gradus quosdam ascendentes, per scalam Jacob in cœlum perveniemus. Etenim scalæ illæ mihi, per illam visionem, paulatim per virtutes ascensum significare videntur, per quem a terrâ ad cœlum ascendere nobis licet, non gradibus sensibilibus, sed morum incremento et correctione. Homil. 82 in Joan.

all anger. By these means I kept myself unstained by evil words, debasing actions, and the shameless lusts which, for a passing gratification, leave the soul pierced through and through with deep remorse and poignant regrets."* Now, these contrivances, if we reflect upon them a little, are precisely what is implied in the Particular Examination of which we are now discoursing, the object of which is to curb our passions, uproot our vices, and implant within the soul Christian perfection; as will be more plainly set forth in the following paragraph. And if a philosopher, by the sole light of his natural reason, was able to discover the efficacy of this means in order to the amendment of his life, and practised it with such constancy, how much more willingly should it not be embraced by a Christian, who has the light of faith, and the example of so many saints and spiritual persons that walked by this road, and by it attained perfection; by a Christian, I say, who is more strictly bound than the heathens to aim at procuring the amendment of his life!

380. We come now to the practical part of this most useful exercise. It comprises, as we may learn from that golden book, the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, five distinct acts. First: On rising in the morning, we are to make a firm, strong purpose to avoid the fault of which we intend to correct ourselves by means of the Particular Examination; and this purpose must be earnestly renewed in time of meditation; for, as Thomas à Kempis says, "Our spiritual progress is proportioned to our good purposes."† Secondly: If we happen to fall during the day, we must lay our hands on our hearts, and make an act of sorrow, with a determina-

* Deinde hisce rebus instruebam animum meum, ut qui non minus amapietatem, quam philosophiam, ut primum aliquos dies sacros sine irascendo transigerem, veluti absque temulentiâ, vinoque, non aliter quam si celebrassem Nephaila, aut Melisponda, in quibus vinum attingere, et luxui indulgere nefas est. Deinde faciebam idem mensem unum, aut duos, paulatim mei ipsius periculum faciens. Sic tempore proficiebam ad ulteriorum malorum tolerantiam, diligenter attendens, et conservans me ipsum placidum, iræque vacuum; purum et a dictis improbis, et a factis absurdis, et a cupiditate, quæ ob voluptatem exiguam, et invenustam, tum curas ingentes, et pœnitentiam turpissimam adduceret. De Cohibendâ Irâ.

† Secundum propositum nostrum cursus profectûs nostri. De Imit. Christi, lib. i., cap. 19.

tion to be more careful for the future. It was the custom of the monks of olden times to note down their faults as soon as they had committed them. St. John Climacus relates, that having visited a monastery of most strict and austere observance, he saw that the monk who was in charge of the refectory, had a small book hanging at his girdle, and on asking him to what use the book was put, the monk answered that it served for him to note down the thoughts that passed through his mind; and, adds the Saint, from what I witnessed among the rest of the brotherhood, I perceived that this was the custom of the greater number.* He concludes with these remarkable words: "He is a good spiritual banker who, every night, strikes the balance of each day's losses and gains. But that this may be done with accuracy, it is required that we should take note, hour by hour, of the profit and loss which is the result of our daily spiritual traffic."† Some, in order to be able to keep this account more easily and regularly, carry about with them, but concealed from sight, a string of beads, on which they register their faults as soon as ever they happen to fall into them. By which means they are enabled to keep an exact account of their failings without attracting the least notice of others, or having to draw upon their own memory.

381. Thirdly: At night, when we are making the general examination of the whole day, we should take special notice of the fault we have set ourselves to uproot by means of the Particular Examination; making special acts of contrition for our failings under this head, and renewing our good purposes with greater earnestness: we should then mark them down on a small piece of paper, or in a little book. St. Ignatius gives a model of these entries. He tells us to draw on a sheet of paper certain lines of unequal length, each rather longer than the following: on the longer ones we are to note down the faults committed on the earlier days of the week: the lines which correspond to the following days

* Non solum autem illum, sed et alios quamplures id facere ibidem perspexi. Gradu 4.

† Optimus ille trapezita est, qui quotidie vespere lucrum, ac detrimentum omnino computat. Quod scire manifestius non potest, nisi horis singulis in tabulis omnia denotet: nam cum calculi singulis horis ponuntur, totius diei ratio postmodum clarius agnoscitur.

gradually shorten; because it may be supposed that we are improving, and consequently diminishing daily the number of our faults.

382. Fourthly: After a few weeks have passed, we should examine our paper or book, to see the number of times we have fallen in each day, comparing day with day, week with week, and carefully taking account of our progress or determination: as St. John Chrysostom teaches.* If we find that there has been improvement, we must give thanks to God, and take heart to strive more earnestly after our full and complete amendment. Should we, however, discover that no amendment has been made, and that we have perhaps even gone back, we must determine to employ additional means; such as, for instance, to be more watchful over ourselves, to have more frequent recourse to God in prayer, to make use of some bodily penance; so that we may move the heart of God to grant such more powerful and efficacious assistance as may help us to overcome our weakness: and other things of this description.

383. Fifthly: We should further impose some mortification on ourselves, in the measure of the frequency of our failings. It has been already observed, that this remedy should be applied to every notable transgression; and it may now be added, that it is especially suitable to use such penance for the uprooting of the faults upon which the Particular Examination is made, as the correction of this should be our main object. We may allege, by way of conclusion, the example of St. Ignatius, that great master of the spiritual life. Failing in health, on account of advancing years, having been long enriched by God with so many supernatural gifts, and being, as it were, consummate in all perfection, he still always made his Particular Examination, and kept by him a little book in which he noted down his failings; nor did he, even to his latest breath, omit this holy and useful practice; for, after his death, this book was found under his pillow, left there as

* Scrutemur nostram quique conscientiam, et rationem examinemus, et consideremus, quidnam in hâc hebdomadâ probe actum sit, quid in aliâ; et quale augmentum fecerimus ad sequentem, quas in nobis affectiones correxerimus. Hom. 11 in Genes. 5.

if it were his dying recommendation to all devout persons never to neglect a practice of such great efficacy for the amendment of their lives, and for the attainment of perfection.*

CHAPTER V.

PRACTICAL HINTS TO DIRECTORS ON THE SUBJECT OF THE PRESENT ARTICLE.

384. FIRST suggestion. Concerning the use of daily examination of conscience, two reflections will occur to every Director: First, that this exercise may be taken up by any one, even by those who are incapacitated by want of education from the use of other religious practices, such as meditating, and reading spiritual books. Every one is able to go to Confession, and therefore able also to examine his conscience every day, and grieve over his faults. Secondly, that no single person should ever dispense himself from making this examination. I am not speaking merely of such as aspire to perfection, but even of those who neither profess it, nor trouble themselves about it; because this is an important means not merely for securing the perfection, but the very salvation of our souls. Nor will the Director be slow to believe this truth, if he will only reflect that it is the natural tendency of all human things to deteriorate and eventually to perish and come to nothing unless they be repaired. A building is ever getting out of order in some one of its parts; and if it be not frequently put in repair, it will at length tumble down and be reduced to a heap of bricks. A farm is ever tending to deteriorate, and, if the soil be not generously enriched, all will finally become an uncultivated waste. A garment is injured a little every day by wearing, and, unless it be mended, will soon be a collection of rags. Now, these are but so many types of our souls. Such is the violence

* Alvarez de Paz, lib. iii., part. 3, c. 11. De Adept. Virtut.

with which our passions incline us to evil; so powerful are the incitements of the devil urging us to what is wrong; so numerous are the dangerous occasions which allure us to sin; that it is impossible for our souls—exposed as they are to so many assaults—not to fall at times, not to yield occasionally to so many fascinations, and not to descend gradually on the downward path, to the great ruin of our souls. If such losses are not daily made good by the Examination of Conscience, by repentance and renewal of good purposes, it cannot be but that we shall become disorganised to such an extent as at length to perish miserably, as is indeed the case every day with those careless Christians who do not avail themselves of these means. The Director will, therefore, strive with a holy effort to inculcate this so advantageous a practice on all his penitents of whatever class they may be composed.

385. St. Gregory the Great explains, by a comparison drawn from our bodily life, the decay which daily takes place in our souls, and the need there is of making it good by self-examination, repentance and tears. "Our bodies," he writes, "develop and decay insensibly, without our perceiving it. Who has ever watched the gradual lengthening and growth of the body of a young child? Who has ever seen the limbs of a decrepit old man contract and become shrunken? Who was ever conscious of the growth or decay of his own body? By slow and imperceptible degrees the hair grows white, the flesh gathers into wrinkles, the limbs wither, the body becomes bent, and the frame, without our perceiving it, slowly wastes away. Thus, too," goes on the holy Doctor, "does the spirit within us grow and decay without our being conscious of it; and even as devout persons, when diligent, advance in virtue unawares, so do the souls of the negligent and slothful, who will not take daily account of their improvement or deterioration, continue to sink downwards and to get more and more out of order, without their perceiving it. Hence," the same holy Pontiff concludes, "we must frequently look into ourselves; often search our own consciences, and by repentance strive to renew ourselves and regain our former state."* I repeat, then,

* Sicut etiam non sentimus, quando crescunt membra, proficit corpus, mu

if a Director have any zeal for the salvation of the souls of persons who have placed themselves under his care, he will not fail to inculcate the use of daily examination of conscience.

386. Second suggestion. The teaching of the saints, as was pointed out in the preceding Chapters, is that this examination of conscience should be made twice daily, morning and evening. In proof whereof we alleged St. Ephrem, St. Dorotheus, St. Bernard; nor are there wanting founders of Religious Orders who, following the teachings of the saints, have imposed it as a rule binding on all their subjects. But, as the Director may be unable to obtain this double examination of conscience from every one, he must at least take care that none of his penitents omit it before lying down to rest, as the end of the day is the most suitable time for taking account of our conscience and of all that we have done; because the darkness itself and the quiet of night time are favourable both to attention and recollection, and consequently to repentance for our faults. Should, however, the penitent be so tepid as not to afford hope of a careful and diligent examination, we must strive to obtain from him that he will at least cast his eyes over the past day, see what are those more grievous failings which present themselves at once to the mind, and afterwards blot them out by an act of contrition. This will serve not only to cleanse once more his conscience of its stains, but to render him more guarded on the day following. He thus will avoid a fate which is but too common to many of the faithful, who having once started on the wrong path, throw the reins—so to speak—on the neck of their passions, and go deeper and deeper into sin, without restraint as without remorse. If the penitent refuse to do even this trifle, he must acknowledge that he cares very little indeed for his eternal salvation. Just as a tradesman, who can never bring himself to strike the balance of

tatur species, nigredo capillorum albescit in canis (hæc enim omnia, nobis nescientibus, aguntur in nobis): ita mens nostra per momenta vivendi ipso curarum usu a se ipsâ permutatur, et non cognoscimus nisi vigilanti custodiâ ad interiora nostra residentes, profectus nostros quotidie, defectusque pensemus. . . . Cum vero (anima) semetipsam quærit, et subtiliter pœnitendo se discutit, ab ipsâ suâ vetustate suis lota lacrymis, et mœrore incensa renovatur. Moral., lib. xxv., cap. 6.

his receipts and expenses, gives a clear sign that he is indifferent whether he be making money or losing it.

387. Third suggestion. The Particular Examination may be proposed to such persons as, being freed from the bonds of grievous sin, begin to aspire to perfection; this being a most effectual help to its attainment. To ensure this result, however, the Director must assign the subject-matter about which the Examination should be made. Let him also observe, in the account of conscience received from penitents, what is the predominant passion of each, what the most frequent fault, and what the greatest hindrance in the way of his progress in spirit; and let him direct each to make his Particular Examination upon that point, first instructing every one as to the proper manner of making it according to the method we have detailed above. However, let him bear in mind, that among the several defects he may notice, it is better to begin with the correction of such as are outward, both because these are commonly occasions of scandal, or at least of disedification, to our neighbour, and because they are more easily corrected than inward defects, which are rooted in our souls, and are, as it were, a part of our nature. Common prudence dictates that it is better to begin with more easy tasks, and to make these a stepping-stone to more difficult and arduous undertakings.

388. Fourth suggestion. The Director should engage his penitents to give an account of the progress made in the matter of their Particular Examination. He should himself impose the mortifications and penances to be performed in expiation of the faults which each one may commit, and should suggest the means to be employed in order to secure a more generous victory. But if he discover any notable deterioration or carelessness, he may, at times, in punishment of the negligence, deprive the penitent of Holy Communion; that is, of course, if the person have sufficient virtue to bear the privation with calmness and humility. Dranelius relates, that among certain Indian nations, the masters of those youths who were applying themselves to the acquisition of wisdom, used at night, before the pupils sat down to their meal, to exact an accurate account of their good actions during the day, and when they found that they had been careless about making

progress, they sent them to bed fasting, in order that the next day they might be more diligent in the pursuit of virtue. A similar, but spiritual, fast, may at times be imposed on our penitents when we perceive that they are careless about making progress, and especially about amending that fault to which the Particular Examination would help them with ease to attend.

389. The Director must further take heed lest, instead of being to his penitents a means of improvement, the Particular Examination become for them a very injurious source of disquiet, as frequently happens in the case of women, who are by nature timid, and more especially when to this natural timidity are added the suggestions of the devil. For, seeing that, in spite of their so frequent examinations they advance but little (at least in comparison of what they would desire), and that they are always falling again into the same faults, they lose heart and begin to think that perfection for them is out of the question. The Director will drive these vain alarms from their minds. He will teach them to humble themselves in peace, not to lose courage at the sight of their frailty, but to put all their trust in God. He will remind them that God allows these relapses, and permits the same passions to prevail over them, in order that they may know and feel how great is their own misery,—may acknowledge it in all humility, be self-diffident, look to God for their deliverance, and implore it of Him with fullest trust. He will give them to understand that though we have to do our part in all earnestness towards uproot ing our defects and overcoming our passions, yet the victory is the gift of God, and must be bestowed by His bountiful arms :—that He will withhold it from such as lose heart and get discouraged, and grant it to such only as distrust themselves and place all their trust in Him alone.

ARTICLE X.

Ninth means for attaining Perfection.—Frequent Communion.

CHAPTER I.

HOLY COMMUNION THE CHIEF MEANS FOR ATTAINING CHRISTIAN PERFECTION.

390. I GROUND my teaching upon that of the Angelic Doctor, when I say that Holy Communion is the chief means for attaining perfection. The Saint says that Baptism is the source of spiritual life; that the other sacraments are its development, inasmuch as they are designed to prepare the soul, and to dispose it, through the sanctification they effect, to the reception of the Holy Eucharist: and that the Blessed Sacrament is the end and complement of all the other sacraments, by which the spiritual life of the Christian is crowned and perfected.* If, then, our spiritual life takes its origin in Baptism, its increase from the other sacraments, its fulfilment and perfection from the Holy Eucharist, it is plain that the reception of this last is the chief means for attaining the perfection of our souls. But that so important a truth may sink the deeper into the reader's mind, it is necessary to allege the reasons why this Divine Sacrament is a perennial fountain of sanctification and perfection for the souls of the faithful.

391. As was said at the beginning of this Section, our perfection is, in substance, nothing else than our union with our Last End: for as a stone may be considered to have attained its perfection when it rests in its centre, to which all its motion tends;

* Baptismus est principium vitæ spiritualis, et janua Sacramentorum. Eucharistia vero est quasi consummatio vitæ spiritualis, et omnium Sacramentorum finis, ut supra dictum est. Per sanctificationem enim omnium Sacramentorum fit preparatio ad suscipiendam, vel consecrandam Eucharistiam. Et ideo perceptio Baptismi est necessaria ad inchoandam spiritualem vitam; perceptio vero Eucharistiæ est necessaria ad consummandam ipsam. 3 p., qu. 14, al. 73, art. 3, in corp.

and as a flame may be called perfect when it has reached the sphere to which it is always tending, so too is the soul perfect when united with God, Who is the end for which it was created; and the closer it is knit to God by the bond of charity, the greater is its perfection. Now this, says St. Thomas, is precisely the fruit of the Holy Eucharist, wherein the passion of Christ is commemorated. It perfects our souls by uniting them with the crucified Saviour, very God and very Man.* And he again insists on what he had said, that as Baptism is called the Sacrament of Faith, the fundamental virtue of Christian life, which thence draws its origin, so too is the Eucharist called the Sacrament of Charity, since, by uniting the soul to God in the bonds of love, it gives consummation to the spiritual life.† In the succeeding Questions, he says, "Christ could not bring Himself to leave us deprived of His divine presence during this unhappy pilgrimage, but He joins us to Himself by means of his true Body and Blood, as may be read in the sixth Chapter of St. John. Hence this Sacrament is a clear sign of the love that unites God to the soul, and the soul to God."‡

392. There is a great difference between earthly food and this Bread of Heaven; and it is, that the former, when eaten, is, by process of digestion, changed into our own substance, and so repairs the losses which our bodies daily suffer. But this Bread of Heaven, by the supernatural heat of the charity which it kindles within our hearts, changes us into its own divine substance; so that from miserable men that we are, we become deified by the union it effects between us and the Word made flesh. This thought is entirely from St. Augustine.§ Have you ever observed the effect

* Eucharistia est Sacramentum passionis Christi, prout homo perficitur in unione ad Christum passum. In eod. art. ad 3.

† Unde sicut Baptismus dicitur Sacramentum fidei, quæ est fundamentum spiritualis vitæ; ita Eucharistia dicitur Sacramentum Caritatis.

‡ Interim tamen nec suâ presentiâ corporali nos in hac peregrinatione destituit, per sed veritatem Corporis et Sanguinis sui, nos sibi conjungit in hoc Sacramento. Unde ipse dicit Joannis vj.: *Qui manducat meam carnem, et bibit meum sanguinem, in me manet, et ego in eo.* Unde hoc Sacramentum est maximæ caritatis signum. Quæst. 16, alias 73, art. 1, in corp.

§ Cibus sum grandium: cresce, et manducabis me; nec tu me mutabis in e sicut cibum carnis tuæ; sed tu mutaberis in me. Confess., lib. vij. c. 10.

of fire on a log of wood? First it heats, and then inflames, and, driving out the opposite qualities of coldness, dampness, and hardness, it at length changes the wood into itself, making it to become a fire like unto that by which it is consumed. Such, says St. Dionysius the Areopagite, is the working of Christ in the most Holy Sacrament. He first warms our souls with the genial heat of His divine love, then, dispelling by degrees the contrary qualities of venial sins and earthly attachments, He kindles charity within us, and deifies us by the force of love.*

393. In proof of this, we may point to St. Mary Magdalen de' Pazzi, St. Catharine of Sienna, St. Teresa of Jesus, St. Philip Neri, St. Francis Xavier, and thousands of other holy souls, who, by approaching to this divine Sacrament as to a furnace of love, quickly burst out into the most ardent flames of charity. And what were the absorption of mind, loss of sense, rapture, ecstasy, endured by these blessed souls when receiving Holy Communion, but the flames of love enkindled within them by this Heavenly Bread, whereby, lost to themselves, they were transformed into their Lord concealed beneath the sacramental veils, through the close union effected between them and their hidden God? And those tears of sweetness that flow from the eyes of so many of God's servants when approaching the Holy Table, what are they but drops distilled through the fire of love which this Food of Angels lights up within their breasts? Well then might St. Dionysius say, that in this Sacrament Christ is a fire of love that inflames and consumes all who approach Him, and transforms them into furnaces of charity like Himself. Well might St. Augustine affirm, that the Holy Eucharist is a food which transforms him who partakes of it into itself, making the recipient, by union with the Godhead, become himself divine, sharing as he does the life of God. But as these ecstatic and exceptional transformations are rather to be admired than sought after, I will give an example of

* Quemadmodum ignis ea, quibus insederit, in suum traducit officium, omnibusque, quomodolibet sibi propinquantibus, sui consortium tradit; haud aliter Dominus noster, et Deus, qui *ignis consumens est*, nos per cibum hunc sacratissimum in sui traducit effigiem, deiformesque reddit. De Cœlesti Hierarchiâ.

another transformation of love, proper to this Sacrament, which may be lawfully desired by all, for it is within the reach of all.

394. St. Lidwina, in the beginning of her grievous illnesses, showed herself to be as weak in heart, in bearing her sufferings, as she was infirm in body.* God so disposing, she was visited by John Por, a great servant of His; he, finding that she was not perfectly resigned to her painful situation, exhorted her to frequent meditation on the Passion of our Saviour, as a means of encouraging herself to patience, by the memory of what Christ Himself underwent. She promised to comply with this advice, but the thought of Jesus suffering afforded her no spiritual sustenance whatever; all her meditations were insipid and distasteful to her, and she could not find the slightest consolation in them: so she fell back on her former lamentations and complaints. The same holy man came a second time to visit her, and inquired how she felt while meditating on Christ's Passion, and what profit she had derived from thinking of it? The invalid made answer, "Father, the advice you gave me was excellent, but the sharpness of my pains hinders me from finding any relish or support in the contemplation of what Christ has suffered for us." The holy man repeated, notwithstanding, his former prescription, as being the proper remedy, and, as it were, specific, for her pitiful case; and this time not without a certain success. But the zealous Director not finding that she profited from his counsel as much as he wished, and as much as her perfection required, had recourse to another plan. At his next visit he brought to her, as to one whom sickness prevented going to church, the Blessed Sacrament; and after having given her Holy Communion, he addressed her as follows: "Hitherto you have been exhorted by me to consider constantly your Saviour's Passion as a suitable remedy for your evils: now listen to the exhortation of Jesus Christ Himself in person." Wonderful to relate, hardly had Lidwina swallowed the Sacred Particle, than there was enkindled in her breast so lively a sense of the sufferings of Christ, so ardent a desire to imitate Him in His sorrows, that she burst into abundant weeping, which continued throughout a whole fortnight, without her being able to

* Surius, 14 April. In Vitâ Lidwinæ, part i. cap. 4,

stay the course of her tears. So deeply was she impressed with her Saviour's sufferings, that day and night they were present to her mind, inspiring her with courage to suffer patiently for the love of Him Who had been pleased to undergo so much for the sake of her salvation. In course of time sores began to spread themselves over her whole body; it swarmed with worms; and all her inward parts began to putrefy, with most excruciating and all but insupportable sufferings. Animated, nevertheless, and strengthened by Christ's Passion, which was ever before her mind, she gave thanks and praise to God for her sufferings, and yearned to suffer yet more. She came at last to be able to say, that it seemed to her that it was not herself who suffered, but Christ Who was suffering in her.* The reader may observe how truly St. Thomas has said that the Eucharist perfects man by uniting him with Christ suffering.† Lidwina, by this union with Jesus in Holy Communion, became a great saint, and, in particular, one of the greatest examples of patience that has ever adorned the Church of God: at least we may safely assert that her sanctity took its beginning in the Communion of which we have spoken. Who, then, can doubt that the Holy Eucharist is a very chief means for attaining perfection, as it unites us not only through a sensible love, but by an earnest desire of imitation, to our Last End?

395. But St. John Chrysostom is not content with merely stating that in Holy Communion the faithful soul is united to the Redeemer and transformed into Him by love; he goes still further, and asserts that these vile bodies of ours are united to the Saviour's adorable Body in such manner, that from the two bodies one body alone is formed; and as, if a head could be joined to the neck of a decapitated person, the trunk and the head thus joined together would form one whole, entire, and perfect body, so too, says the Saint, in Holy Communion, by uniting ourselves as members to our Head, who is the Saviour, of the two bodies but one body is formed.‡ In another homily the Holy Bishop says that in this

* Ex ardenti passionis Christi meditatione, adeo inflammata fuit, ut non se, sed Christum Dominum in se pati diceret.

† Homo perficitur in unione ad Christum passum.

‡ Ut non solum per dilectionem, sed re ipsâ in illam carnem convertamur, per cibum id efficitur, quem nobis largitus est. Cum enim suum in nos amo-

Sacrament Christ blends, so to speak, His adorable Flesh with our vile bodies, and so forms of both one body, harmoniously fitted to its Head; and this He does in token of the ardent love which He bears towards us.*

396. It would seem that no stronger words could be used to express the intimate union which is effected in this most august Sacrament between mortal man and the Word made flesh; yet the language of St. Cyril of Alexandria is still stronger. "If you take," he observes, "a piece of wax and place it near the fire, it will melt with the force of the heat,—let another piece be taken, and the same effect will be produced: now let the two portions of liquid wax run together, and they will mix, so that no one will be able to distinguish one from the other, or to separate them again." Thus, says this holy Doctor, does the Redeemer, in coming to us, "mingle His glorified flesh with our sinful flesh, and, like two drops of melted wax, form thereof but one substance. So that we are united with Christ not only in spirit and by the ties of love, but with His flesh by a certain natural participation."† Well may the reader exclaim, in astonishment and amazement with St. Augustine—"Oh, Sacrament of loving-kindness! oh, sign of union! oh, bond of perfect charity! whereby we are so closely united in body and in soul with our loving Redeemer!"‡ And we may further see how truly the Angelic Doctor has said that in this Sacrament the Christian's spiritual life is consummated and perfected as in its ultimate term, and that hence it is the chief means of reaching to the sublimest heights of perfection.

rem indicare vellet, per corpus suum se nobis commiscuit, et in unum nobiscum redegit; ut corpus capiti uniretur. Hoc enim amantium maxime est. Hom. 45 in Joan.

* Propterea semetipsum nobis immiscuit, et corpus suum in nos contemperavit, ut unum quid simus, tamquam corpus capiti cooptatum: ardenter enim amantium hoc est. Hom. 61, Ad Populum Antiochen.

† Considerandum est, non habitudine solum, quæ per caritatem intelligitur, Christum in nobis esse, verum etiam et participatione naturali. Nam quemadmodum si igne liquefactam ceram aliæ ceræ liquefactæ ita miscueris, et unum quid ex utriusque mixtione factum videatur, sic communione Corporis et Sanguinis Christi, ipse in nobis est, et nos in ipso. Lib. x. in Joan. c. 13.

‡ O sacramentum pietatis! O signum unitatis! O vinculum caritatis. Tract. xxviij. in Joan.

CHAPTER II.

THE SALUTARY EFFECTS PRODUCED BY HOLY COMMUNION FURTHER DEMONSTRATE THAT IT IS THE CHIEF MEANS OF ATTAINING PERFECTION.

397. If, as we have shown, we are so closely united in the Holy Eucharist, both in body and soul, to Jesus Christ, Who is our true life, it follows of necesaity that the frequent partaking of this heavenly food must needs produce within us the fruits of a perfect spiritual life. St. Thomas, in enumerating them, uses the parity of the effects which our daily food produces in our bodily frames. This Sacrament, he says, is given under the form of food and drink, whence it produces in the soul the same effects as meat and drink produce in our bodies; and as by our food the life of the body is sustained, increased, and made glad, and the wasting effects of all that tends to destroy it are repaired, so, too, does the Holy Eucharist work the same results in the spiritual life of the soul.* Hence, according to the Angelic Doctor, this Divine Sacrament produces within us these four salutary effects: it supports the life of the soul lest it fail; it fortifies it against whatever might prove hurtful and tend to its destruction; it brings to it growth and increase; it causes it pleasure. Let us examine these effects one by one.

398. The first effect of Holy Communion is to maintain and support spiritual life lest it waste away. This has been defined by the Council of Trent. Our Blessed Saviour willed that we should partake of this Sacrament as of a food which nourishes our souls and strengthens us to live with the life of Him who has said, *He that eats Me, the same shall live by Me.*† And for this

* Tertio consideratur effectus hujus Sacramenti ex modo quo traditur hoc Sacramentum, quod traditur per modum cibi et potûs; et ideo omnem effectum, quem cibus et potus materialis facit, quantum ad vitam corporalem — quod scilicet sustentat, auget, separat, delectat—hoc totum facit hoc Sacramentum, quantum ad vitam spiritualem. 3 part. q. 20, alias 79, art. 1, in corp.

† Sumi autem voluit Salvator noster Sacramentum hoc, tamquam spirit-

there are two reasons—First: The Eucharist keeps the soul far removed from deadly sin, which is the true death of the spirit, just as earthly food preserves our bodies from that death to which, without it, they would soon fall victims. In like manner the Sacrament of the Eucharist keeps the soul free from the death of grievous sin. Secondly: It preserves us from lesser offences, which are the immediate proximate disposition to this most lamentable death. The Sacrament of the Altar, says St. Bernard, produces within us these two effects—it removes far from us all danger of yielding to mortal sin, and diminishes in us the tendency and proneness to lesser faults,* so that we abstain from them more easily, and fall into them less frequently. And St. Cyril of Alexandria teaches in like manner, that this blessed Sacrament not only drives darkness away from the soul, but expels all our spiritual diseases; for venial sins are to the soul, not indeed death, but maladies which weaken it, and render it languishing and predisposed to die.†

399. But what wonder that this heavenly food should sustain the life of the soul, when it has so frequently been the staff and support of even the life of the body? Every one knows that St. Catharine of Sienna fasted a whole Lent without any other sustenance than that which she received at the Holy Table.‡ A Roman virgin, Felice, happy alike by name and by holiness of life, passed five entire Lents nourished by the Bread of Angels alone.§ In Switzerland, a holy hermit called Nicholas Vanderflue, for fifteen years took no other nourishment than that which was supplied him by the Body of Jesus Christ in this Sacrament.‖ St. Liberalis, Bishop of Athens, was accustomed to receive every Sunday the

ualem animarum cibum, quo alantur, et confortentur viventes vitâ illius qui dixit, *Qui manducat me, et ipse vivet propter me.* Sess. xiij. c. 2.

* Duo illud Sacramentum operatur in nobis, ut videlicet sensum minuat in minimis, et in gravioribus peccatis tollat omnino consensum. Serm. de Bapt. in Cœna Dom.

† Quæ (nempe communio) mihi crede, non mortem solum, verum etiam morbos omnes depellit. Lib. iv. in Joan., cap. 17.

‡ Apud Surium, 29 Aprilis.

§ Apud Cacciaguerra.
Sim. Majol. Dierum Canicul., coll. 4.

Flesh and most precious Blood of our Saviour at the holy Altar, and then to spend the rest of the week fasting; yet he continued hale and hearty, nourished by this sacred aliment alone * We find many similar instances in Church History, by which our Blessed Lord has intended to teach us, that if this Sacrament avails thus, at times, to sustain our bodily life, though it be not its fitting and natural food, it will sustain far more effectually the life of the soul, this being the special object for which it was ordained.

400. The next effect is to preserve the soul from all that can be detrimental to it. Now, the enemies of our spiritual life may be divided into two classes: first, our unruly passions, with their disordered motions and impulses; and, secondly, the devils with their suggestions and tempting. And both are repressed and kept from injuring us by frequent Communion. Concerning the extinguishing of our lusts, St. Cyril of Alexandria, whom we have more than once quoted, teaches that Christ abiding within us quenches the lusts of our souls, quiets the irregular motions of our members which domineer over the spirit, and strengthens within us piety and devotion.† The Angelic Doctor examines this assertion with theological precision, and affirms that though this Sacrament be not expressly ordained for the extinction or lessening of our lusts, yet it does temper and weaken them by kindling fervour, by exciting devotion, and by increasing the ardour of charity.‡

401. A traveller journeying under the rays of the noonday sun, feeling his vitals burnt up with a raging thirst, if he chance to meet with some sparkling fountain, moistens his parched lips with the cooling draught, and by it slakes his thirst. In the same manner, when a man is inflamed with anger, hatred, lust, envy, covetousness, or any other inordinate affection, if he often approach to the waters of life, of which this Sacrament is the

* P. Nat., lib. iv., Cat. Sanct., cap. 93.

† Sedat, cum in nobis manet Christus, sævientem membrorum nostrorum legem: pietatem corroborat, perturbationes animi extinguit.

‡ Dicendum, quod licet hoc Sacramentum non directe ordinetur ad diminutionem fomitis, diminuit tamen fomitem ex quâdam consequentiâ, in quantum auget caritatem. 3 part., quæst. 20, alias 76, art. 6, ad 3.

source, and drink of its limpid streams, little by little the ardour of his passions will be tempered, the fever of ill-regulated desire will abate, and soon his disordered affections will be reduced to a proper moderation. Hence St. Bernard said to his monks, "If any among you feel that the motions of anger, envy, lust or of other appetites, have grown less violent than they have been, let him give thanks for this grace to the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ which he has received at the Eucharistic Table; for in him the work of this Divine Sacrament is clearly being manifested."*

402. The holy Abbot had the consolation of seeing a practical illustration of this, his constant teaching to his monks, in the case of a layman of depraved habits. The story is told by Cesarius.† A soldier was blinded by so strong a passion for one of his kindred, that nothing availed to draw him back to a sense of decency. The reproaches of his relatives, the remonstrances of the Priests, the censures of his Bishop, the public disgrace which resulted from so scandalous a connection, were all equally unheeded. He fell dangerously ill, and was soon at death's door. Terrified at the near approach of his death, the unhappy man called in a Priest and begged for the last Sacraments. A Priest came, bringing with him the Holy Eucharist; but before giving Communion, he admonished the sick man to renounce his criminal affection, dismiss the partner of his guilt, and make his peace with God by an exact Confession. Blinded as he was by his passion, the soldier answered that he could not bring himself to part with the woman. The Priest, seeing that the man was unworthy of the Sacrament, left the house to return to his own Church. By a special providence, the saintly Abbot of Clairvaux happened to be journeying that way, and to hear of this deplorable occurrence; whereupon he told the Priest to turn back and accompany him. Entering into the chamber of the poor dying person, his sweet and moving address had such power to make him renounce this guilty attachment, that at length he judged

* Si quis vestrûm non tam sæpe, modo, non tam acerbos sentit iracundiæ motus, invidiæ, luxuriæ, aut ceterorum hujusmodi, gratias agat Corpori, et Sanguini Domini, quoniam virtus Sacramenti operatur in eo. Serm. de Baptis. in Cœnâ Domini.

† Lib. ij. Mirac., cap. 17.

him to be sufficiently disposed to receive the Sacraments, and therefore ordered the Priest to administer them. Strange to say, the penitent had no sooner taken the Holy Viaticum, than he felt all his affection for the wicked woman uprooted from his heart, and his love turned to hate; so that, with sighs and tears he told the holy Abbot that sooner would he behold the countenance of any wild and ferocious beast, or of the most frightful monster that can be imagined, than that of the woman of whom he had been so madly enamoured; and then, with thanks on his lips to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament for this sudden change of heart, he died, still shedding copious tears of perfect contrition. See, from this fact, how great is the power of the Sacrament of the Eucharist for laying low and subduing any passion, however deeply-rooted in our hearts. And if a single Communion can thus avail, though received by a person who had previously lived so disorderly a life, what effect will not a regular and devout frequentation of this Sacrament produce in the soul of a pious person?

403. The other impediment to the spiritual life of our souls, from which Holy Communion sets us free, is found in the temptations of the devils, who beholding us united with Christ, and we may even say having one body with our Head and victorious Captain, are filled with fear and trembling, fly away and venture not to molest us with their suggestions. So St. Thomas remarks while treating of this Sacrament. If, however, they do continue to assail us, their temptations have no power, or very little, against us.* In short, the demons act with us as a general of an army with the enemy; if he sees that we are weak, he is encouraged to attack us; but if he sees us in close alliance with a leader stronger than himself, at the head of a mightier host than his own, he takes alarm and withdraws, and if precluded from retiring, attacks the enemy, indeed, but with little spirit. "The Blood of Christ," says St. John Chrysostom, "drives the devils far from us, calls the Angels and the Lord of Angels to our side; for when the Blood of our Redeemer is seen within us, the wicked spirits take to flight and the Angels hasten to our defence."† Hence the same

* Repellit omnem dæmonu impugnationem. Loco citato. In corp.

† Hic mysticus sanguis dæmones procul pellit, angelos et angelorum Do-

Saint would have us leave this Holy Table with the spirit of lions, full of holy courage, so that, far from the devils being terrible to us, we may ourselves be formidable to the very powers of hell.*

404. Thomas Cantipratanus relates† that a heretic, purposing lo lead astray a Friar of the venerable Order of St. Dominic, said to him—"If I should show you Jesus Christ, His most Blessed Mother, and all the Court of Heaven, in proof of what I propose to your belief, would you embrace my teaching?" The Friar, well aware that this promise could never be fulfilled, pledged himself, as requested, that he would believe; just to see what the heretic would really do in order to gain credence for his errors. For this purpose the Religious set out in company with the other, but secretly carried with him under his habit a pyx containing the Blessed Sacrament. The heretic led the way to a deep and gloomy cavern, through which they passed into a spacious and pleasant spot, where there stood a lofty palace all beaming with vivid light. On entering it they beheld, seated on a stately throne covered with precious stones, a King in majestic attire, whose countenance also shone with exceeding brightness. At his side a Queen of rare beauty was seen. On either hand, on golden thrones, were comely and venerable personages, who seemed to be patriarchs, prophets, and apostles. All around these were hovering a multitude of angels, of bright and ravishing form. The heretic fell prostrate to worship these phantoms, and bade the Friar do likewise. He, however, without bowing his body in the least, approached the throne of the Queen, and, bringing forth the sacred pyx, said—"If thou be the Mother of God, behold thy Son, adore Him, and then will I worship thee as His Mother." At the appearance of the Blessed Sacrament, the whole scene—palace and King and Queen, and angels and elders—vanished like the mists of the night at sunrise, and he found himself with his companion at the bottom of a gloomy cavern,

minum ad nos allicit: dæmones enim cum dominicum sanguinem in nobis vident, in fugam vertuntur, angeli autem currunt. Hom. 45, in Joann.

* Tamquam leones igitur ignem spirantes ab illâ mensâ surgamus, diabolo formidabiles. Idem. Eâd. Hom.

† Apud, lib. ij., cap. 37, p. 23.

enveloped in darkness, so that they had much ado to grope their way back to the true light of the sun. Now we may draw this moral from the story just related. If the Blessed Sacrament contained in a pyx had the virtue of dissipating the illusions conjured up in the eyes of these two beholders by the devil, and to put to flight both himself and all his host, may we not believe that the same Sacrament received within our breasts will cause the noxious images which the devil imprints on our minds to vanish, and will extinguish the lustful motions which he stirs up in our hearts for our ruin; and, above all, by its indwelling, will drive our foes far, far from us? For it is impossible that Christ, hidden beneath the sacramental veils, should have more power to help us when seen to be by our side, than when united and incorporated with us, and become, as it were, a part of our very selves.

405. The third effect of frequent Communion is to give growth and increase to our spiritual life. For, just as our bodily frame, by fatigue and outward occupations, and even by application to mental labour, gradually wastes away and is consumed, and as the particles of which our body is formed are insensibly carried off in manifold ways by the very wear and tear of life, so that, unless this constant loss were restored by food, little by little we should cease to exist; so too our souls, with the distractions of daily business, by slow degrees lose the heat of charity; the feeling of our devotion tends to diminish; unperceived by us, our interior spirit becomes dissipated; and, were there not a remedy provided for these losses, we must at length come to our ruin. But God be thanked, Who has given us this Bread from Heaven, wherewith our distracted mind may recollect itself, our cooling fervour may be rekindled, the flame of our charity be lit up anew, and the life of our soul rendered more hale and strong than ever, so that we may run with fresh vigour in the way of Christian perfection. This has been aptly put by St. Cyprian, who attributes our progress in perfection to the frequent use of this Divine Sacrament. He says: "*How excellent is that chalice*, how agreeable to piety is it to be intoxicated by this draught, whereby we are guilty of a holy excess for God's sake, and, *forgetting those things that are behind, stretch forward to that which*

is before us:—whereby we come to feel no pleasure in worldly delight, but to despise the riches of such as are *clad in purple*, and to cling to the Cross alone."*

406. As is well known, the life of the soul consists in Sanctifying Grace, as thereby we are made partakers of the divine nature, and begin to live the life of God in the supernatural order. Now, according to the teaching of theology, it is in the sacraments of Baptism and of Penance that this grace is imparted for the first time to such as are deprived of it. The other sacraments, presupposing the existence of this grace in those who receive them, give an increase of the same priceless treasure. But in no other sacrament is this increase so great as in the Holy Eucharist, for in this Christ Himself comes in person to impart grace to us; and thus it is fitting that He should bestow it in greater plenty and, so to speak, with open hands; even as a monarch, when he bestows an alms in person, is necessarily more generous and munificent than when the distribution is made by the hands of his servants. From this I would infer that the Sacrament of the Altar not only strengthens the life of the soul—as was shown in the foregoing paragraph—but increases and augments it beyond measure, in proportion to the grace which in each fresh Communion is newly imparted to the soul.

407. The fourth effect of this Heavenly Food is to fill the soul with those delights which are proper to the spirit. This is the teaching of St. Thomas, who asserts that this great Sacrament has the special property of giving a delight which is felt by the souls of devout receivers; even as bodily food gives pleasure to the palate of him that partakes of it.† St. Cyprian adds, that the pleasure which the soul receives from this Bread of Angels is so intense as to alienate and detach it from all worldly gratifications. Hence, what is written concerning the Manna from Heaven which was rained upon the children of Israel in the wilderness, will apply yet

* Quam præclarus est calix iste, quam religiosa est hujus potûs ebrietas, per quam excedimus Deo, et quæ retro sunt, obliti, ad anteriora extendimur, non habentes sensum hujus mundi, sed divitis purpurati divitias contemnentes, cruci hæremus. Serm. in Cœnâ Domini.

† Hoc autem Sacramentum est spiritualis manducatio, quæ habet actualem delectationem. 3 part., q. 20, alias 79, art. 8, ad 2.

more strongly to this true Heavenly Manna; for although that which was given in the wilderness had every kind of delicious taste, yet it did not fully satisfy or content the children of Israel who used it for their food, nor did it prevent their hankering after the flesh-pots and onions of Egypt. But this Bread from Heaven fills devout and duly-disposed souls with such delight as to detach them from, and disgust them with, all carnal pleasures whatever.*

408. We may go yet further: the delight which this Celestial Food imparts to devout souls is so great that it sometimes overflows and inundates the outer senses, causing the palate to savour a sweetness that neither honey, nor milk, nor the nectar of the poets, nor any other most dainty thing can vie with: pouring forth goodly odours, compared with which the perfumes of the violet, of the rose, of the lily, of frankincense, and of every choicest spice and gum, have no charm: as, both in ages now past, and in these our own days, has been experienced by so many servants of God in the act of receiving this Heavenly Food. It must, however, be borne in mind, that Holy Communion does not invariably affect the soul, and much less the body, in this sensible manner: still, it never fails to leave in devout and well-prepared persons a sense of spiritual refreshment—that is, a certain peace, a serene light, an inclination to good, a greater readiness for the practice of virtue—all which are more profitable far, and far more to be desired by such as are solicitous for the solid advancement of their souls.

409. Hence we may conclude, that the effects of the Eucharistic Banquet are the four enumerated by St. Thomas. This Blessed Sacrament supports our spiritual life; it wards off from it whatever would be prejudicial and tend to its destruction; it gives growth and increase; and it fills with delight. So that, as this holy Doctor observes, the Christian's spiritual life is perfected in this most Holy Sacrament, to which therefore we should have recourse as to the main instrument of our spiritual perfection. If,

* Panis iste Angelorum *omne delectamentum habens*, virtute r irificâ omnibus, qui digne, et devote sumunt, secundum suum desiderium sapit, et amplius quam manna illud eremi implet et satiat edentium appetitus; et omnium carnalium saporum irritamenta, et omnium superat dulcedinum voluptates. Serm. in Cœnâ Domini.

then, the reader be desirous of amending his life, and of advancing in the path of spiritual perfection, he should approach Holy Communion as frequently as possible, following, however, always the advice and guidance of his Director.

CHAPTER III.

THE PROXIMATE DISPOSITIONS WITH WHICH THE DEVOUT SOUL SHOULD PREPARE FOR HOLY COMMUNION.

410. I AM now going to treat of the proximate dispositions for Holy Communion, omitting all mention of the remote preparation, which should have been made long before, and which consists in great perfection and sanctity of life; this being, of course, indispensable for such as would receive within their breasts the King of Heaven. I have in view, then, those dispositions only which all ought to secure in themselves shortly before approaching the Altar, as being necessary for the acquirement of that increase of perfection which, in preceding Chapters, we showed to result from this Heavenly Banquet.

411. For a vine-branch to bear fruit in plenty, it is not enough that it be set in the vine-stock and be supported by it, but, further, it must be neither withered nor dead, and must, moreover, possess a sufficiency of sap to enable it to bring forth in abundance its sweet fruits. In like manner, for a person to obtain from Holy Communion the above-mentioned effects, it will not suffice for him to be in mere material union with Christ, our true stay, but he must, in addition, be in a state of grace; for if he be like a dry and sapless branch joined to the Tree of Life, that is, to our Blessed Saviour, he will of a surety fail to produce fruits of life everlasting. While St. Piamon was celebrating Mass, he saw beside the Altar an Angel of majestic appearance, holding a golden book, in which he was taking down the names of the monks as they approached the Sanctuary to receive the glorified Body of our Redeemer. He further observed, that when certain

monks drew near to the altar, the Angel kept his pen uplifted, and did not write down their names. At the end of the function, the Saint summoned the monks whose names the Angel had not registered, and requiring of each an exact account of conscience, he discovered that every one of them was defiled with grievous sin. He brought them to a true repentance; and, on next offering the Holy Sacrifice, he saw the Angel inscribing their names also in the Book of Life.* It is to be noticed, that although these unhappy monks united themselves, like their companions, bodily to Jesus Christ, yet, as withered branches and destitute of the life of grace, they were incapable of receiving from this life-giving Flesh the fruits of everlasting life; hence their names were not registered by the Angel in the Book of Life.

412. But further, the Communicant must not approach the Holy Table with a distracted and wandering mind, but must be full of the sap of devotion; else, like a vine-branch, living, indeed, but barren, he will be incapable of receiving from union with Jesus Christ those plenteous fruits of salvation and perfection, which, as St. Thomas teaches, are the immediate effects of this Divine Sacrament: a Sacrament which not only increases sanctifying or habitual grace, but gives a certain spiritual comfort that refreshes the soul and strengthens it to advance in the path of virtue and perfection.† But, he adds, this latter effect is prevented when any one receives with a distracted mind, with indevotion, and carelessness about venial faults.

413. Now, the devotion which should be the ultimate preparation for receiving this Bread of Angels, consists mainly, if I mistake not, in the three following classes of acts:—First, in acts of lively faith, Secondly, in acts of deepest humility and reverence; Thirdly, in acts of fervent desire. Before any one approaches this Holy Table, let him quicken his faith within him, and believe that in the Sacred Particle, little as it is in outward seeming, there is hidden the very God in the flesh, Who reigns

* In Vitis Patrum, Vita 31, S. Piamonis.

† Effectus hujus Sacramenti non solum est adeptio habitualis gratiæ, et caritatis, sed etiam quædam actualis refectio spiritualis dulcedinis: quæ quidem impeditur si aliquis accedat ad hoc Sacramentum per peccata venialia mente distractus. 3 p., quæst. 20, alias 79, art 8, in corp.

above at the right hand of the Father Everlasting, and Who with the shining of His countenance fills all heaven with joy and delight. Let him believe this more firmly than if he beheld with his eyes and handled with his hands this glorified Flesh. Such was the faith of St. Louis, King of France, in this adorable Sacrament.* It happened one day that, during the celebration of Mass in the King's Chapel, and at the elevation of the Host, Christ appeared to the eyes of all those present under the form of a resplendent and beauteous infant. The Celebrant was requested not to move his hand until the King, being made acquainted with the prodigy, might have the consolation of beholding with his own eyes so glorious a spectacle. The courtiers hastened with the news to his apartment. The holy King replied —"Let those persons run to such sights who do not believe Christ to be truly present in the consecrated host, of which I am more certain than if I beheld Him with my own eyes." Nor would he stir from his cabinet. Such also should be the faith of every devout soul, as it will insure great fruits of holiness at every Communion that is made.

414. Faith must be accompanied by humility, reverence, and a holy awe of the majesty and greatness of the God Whom we are about to receive. For this purpose we may, with St. John Chrysostom, imagine that, while the Celebrant is at the Altar on which Jesus is reposing in the Sacrament, we see Him surrounded by a host of Angels; that we behold them descend in thousands from Heaven to do honour to their King by their canticles and their lowly adoration.† Or with St. Gregory the Great we may, at the time of the Unbloody Sacrifice, figure to ourselves the heavens opening, and Christ compassed about by the angelic choirs, descending with all the pomp and circumstance which befits His Majesty.‡ Thus turning our thoughts to our own misery, and

* Thom. Bozius, l. xiv., De Sign. Eccles., cap. 7, n. 5 et alii.

† Per id tempus et Angeli sacerdoti assident et cœlestium potestatum universus ordo clamores excitat, et locus altari vicinus in illius honorem, qui immolatur, Angelorum choris plenus est: id quod credere abunde licet vel ex tanto illo Sacrificio, quod tunc peragitur. Lib. De Sacerd.

‡ Quis fidelium habere dubium possit in ipsâ immolationis horâ ad sacerdotis vocem cœlos aperiri, in illo Jesu Christi ministerio Angelorum choros

setting this in contrast with such immense grandeur and glory, we may humble ourselves in sentiments of lowly-mindedness, of reverence, veneration, of godly fear, according to the warning which Origen gave to the faithful in the earliest ages of the Church: "When thou receivest," he writes, "this sacred food, this meat of incorruption, this bread and drink of true life, and thou partakest of thy Saviour's Body and Blood, then does God Himself enter under thy roof: do thou then humble thyself, and with the centurion say, *Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldst enter under my roof.**

415. That illustrious Doctor of the Church, St. Jerome, when at the point of death, asked for the Holy Viaticum to be brought to him. As the Blessed Sacrament was approaching his cell, he had himself laid on the bare ground, and gathering up what remnant of strength was left to him in his extremity, he raised himself to kneel on the pavement, bowing down most low; and, striking his breast, received in this position the sacred Body of our Saviour.† St. William, an Archbishop of the Cistercian Order, being about to die, asked with great earnestness for the Blessed Sacrament; and though he was so reduced as to be unable to turn in his bed, or even to swallow a drop of water, when the Body of our Lord was brought in, to the great astonishment of the bystanders, he sprang suddenly from his couch, and, like an expiring flame that flickers up before its final extinction, went forward to meet his Saviour, bending his knees, often bowing down low to do homage to Him, and amid these acts of reverence received his Lord.‡ The dying efforts of these illustrious servants of God witness to their heartfelt veneration for this Divine Sacrament, and to the humility and reverence with which they

adesse; summis ima sociari; terrena cœlestibus jungi: unumque ex visibilibus et invisibilibus fieri. Dialog., lib. iv., cap. 50.

* Quando sacrum cibum illum, illudque incorruptibile accipis epulum, quando vitæ pane et poculo frueris, manducas Corpus et Sanguinem Domini, tunc Dominus sub tectum tuum ingreditur. Et tu ergo humilians teipsum, imitare hunc Centurionem, et dicito: *Domine, non sum dignus ut intres sub tectum meum.* Homil. 5.

† Mar. Marul., lib. iv., cap. 12.

‡ In Vitâ. Apud Surium, 10 Jan.

had always approached it in the days of their health and strength.

416. But what we read concerning the infamous apostate, and obstinate rebel against God's Church, Henry VIII., is calculated to make a still deeper impression upon our mind. After having renounced the Catholic faith, having violated all laws, both human and divine, having laid aside every feeling of decency and piety, he still preserved some sense of veneration for this most Holy Sacrament. The wretched man, being about to die, asked for Holy Communion, and, before receiving, he rose from the seat on which he was sitting, and fell prostrate on the ground; for his sickness did not allow him to lie on a bed. The heretics of the sect of Zwingli, who surrounded him, begged him to remain seated, as his illness was a sufficient excuse for this posture. He replied, "Were I to cast myself not only on, but beneath the ground, I should not think that I was doing sufficient honour to this most Holy Sacrament." The historian from whom we have borrowed this anecdote concludes it thus:—"Would to God that in all other things his mind had been the same! And doubtless it would have been, were it not that the king yielded too readily to the counsels of wicked men, and to the promptings of his own passions."* Now, if this sworn enemy of the faith behaved so reverently toward the Sacrament of the Altar at the moment of receiving it, when in unworthy dispositions, what may we not expect from a Catholic who has the true faith? what from a devout person, in whom this light burns yet more brightly? With what heartfelt humility, with what reverence, with what awe, should not such approach the Table of the Lord, in order to refresh their spirit with this bread of Heaven?

417. The devout communicant should, however, bear in mind that, in his immediate preparation, he must not confine himself to acts of humility, reverence and holy fear to such an extent as to become reluctant to partake of the Lord's Body; but after having exercised himself in these acts, he should next strive to stir up in his breast an ardent love, so as to enkindle within himself an

* Utinam in omnibus talis! Et fuisset indubie, nisi perditorum consiliis ac propriis conscientiis nimium acquievisset. Sanderus, De Schism. Anglic.

earnest desire of receiving the Divine Guest within his heart. This is the third affection whereby we should endeavour to dispose ourselves for the reception of the most Holy Sacrament. The soul should therefore plunge into the consideration of the immense love and sovereign goodness of God, both which shine forth so wondrously in this great mystery. We should reflect how, in spite of His immense greatness and our extreme vileness, He deigns to descend into our breasts, to mingle His Flesh with our miserable flesh, thus to unite Himself most closely with our spirit. We may in this manner inflame ourselves with love for such boundless goodness, and excite our hearts to love Him Who has so loved us. Hence, by natural consequence, will arise ardent desires to be united to the object of our love. As St. John Chrysostom says, "Let none approach with languor or hesitation, but let all be fervent, inflamed with lively desire.* Do you not see," he continues, "how eagerly infants press with their lips their mothers' breasts? With like eagerness ought we to yearn for this Heavenly Table and for the spiritual breasts of this Divine Cup; with the same, yea, rather, with more ardent desire, should we, like sucklings, pant after the breasts of our loving parent Jesus, that we may draw therefrom the milk of His grace. Our only trouble, our only sorrow, should be to see ourselves deprived of this Food of our Souls." † To kindle within us, before the time of Communion, these burning desires, we may contemplate our Divine Saviour under divers aspects, each of which is suitable to His immense loving-kindness. We may consider Him either as a loving Spouse who wishes to unite Himself to our souls, or as a trusty Friend who comes to comfort our hearts; as a loving Father, who awaits us with open arms to press us to His bosom; as a compassionate Physician, who comes with the balm of His grace to heal the wounds of our soul, and to cure it of its diseases; as a tender

* Nemo, igitur, nauseans accedat, nemo irresolutus: sed incensi, ac ferventes omnes accedant. Hom. 83, In Matth.

† Non videtis, quantâ infantes animi alacritate mamillas arripiunt, quâ pressione papillis infigunt labia? Non minori cupiditate nos quoque ad hanc mensam, et ad hujus calicis spiritualem accedamus papillam: immo vero majori desiderio, quasi lactantes pueri gratiam Christi sugamus. Unus sit nobis dolor, una maestitia si hoc alimento spirituali privamur. Ubi supra.

Shepherd, who comes to feed us, His poor flock, with His own Flesh, and to quench our thirst with His Blood; as a faithful Guide, who comes to lead us by His light along the path of perfection, to strengthen us by His inward inspirations, that we may make swift advance: above all, must we behold in Him our highest and only Good, who comes to fill us with all manner of heavenly gifts and blessings. With these devout reflections, let us, as St. John Damascene exhorts, approach with ardent desire, and, with our hands crossed, receive the God who, for our sakes, died upon the Cross.*

418. The more exactly we make this preparation for receiving our dear Lord's most adorable Body, the more plenteous will be the fruits which we shall derive from Holy Communion; the greater, too, its efficacy as a means to the perfecting of spiritual life within our souls. St. Catharine of Sienna aptly explains this by the comparison of several lighted torches; when many of these are lighted, each and every one receives light and heat, but yet each in proportion to its size, while that one receives most light which is itself largest. Thus, too, in Holy Communion, every one receives grace, of which more or less is received according to the measure of the dispositions and capacity of the recipient.† The same truth may be further illustrated by the case of one who goes to draw water at the well; he takes away with him a greater or less quantity according to the measure of the vessel that he brings with him. Hence, the more we expand the bosom of our souls, by faith, humility, and reverence,—by inflamed and loving desires,—the more plentiful the grace, the more effectual the help to attain perfection, which we shall draw from this well-spring of heavenly blessings.‡ We read in the Chronicles of the Cistercian Order, that it happened always to a certain holy monk, after communicating, to taste in his mouth an unspeakable sweetness, which lasted for a single day, sometimes for three days, and sometimes for a whole week. The good man had occasion to rebuke a

* Accedamus ardenti cupiditate ad eam, adeamus, manibusque in crucis formam compositis, Christi corpus suscipiamus. Lib. iv. Orthodoxæ Fidei, cap. 4.

† Dial. 10.

‡ Specul. Exempl., Dist. iij., Exempl. 35.

friend of his, for I know not what failing into which he had fallen, and in administering the correction overstepped somewhat the bounds of moderation and Christian charity. Making no account of his fault, and attributing it to the impulse of a godly zeal, he went to Holy Communion according to his custom. But this time the sacred particle, which had hitherto tasted sweeter than nectar and honey, seemed to him more bitter than wormwood and more nauseous than gall. Horrified at this ominous and unlooked for occurrence, and reflecting that it could have been caused by nothing but his want of meekness and charity when dealing with his neighbour, he imposed on himself a severe penance. The reader may learn hereby that the Sacrament works in us according to the good or bad dispositions which are found in us; he must therefore make his preparation as we have set forth above, if he would gain from it fruits of holiness and perfection.

CHAPTER IV.

HOW FREQUENTLY THE FAITHFUL SHOULD GO TO HOLY COMMUNION, AND WHETHER, IN THE CASE OF SECULARS, THIS FREQUENCY MAY BE EXTENDED TO DAILY COMMUNION.

419. THIS is a point on which Directors differ. Some incline to frequent Communion, and advise those under their care to approach often the Holy Table, in order to partake of this Heavenly Food. Others are averse to this frequency, as they judge it more becoming that their penitents should draw nigh only at longer intervals to this Divine Banquet. It is thus necessary to determine, by the teaching of the Holy Fathers and the dictates of prudence, what should be our practice in so important a matter. But as the main point in dispute is daily Communion, which many consider unsuited to lay people, who are not specially set apart for God's worship, it will be well to sift this question thoroughly, and to search into its very foundations.

420. It is undeniable that in the early Church all the faithful, of w' [illegible]ever condition, whether married or unmarried, whether lay

or ecclesiastics, communicated daily. St. Luke says as much in the Acts of the Apostles.* We read there that the first believers were constantly persevering in the communication of the breaking of bread. And a little further on it is said that the bread was daily broken from house to house, and partaken of with gladness, in singleness of heart, and with hymns of praise to God. The Commentators by this bread understand the consecrated bread of the Holy Eucharist; and with the more foundation as the ancient Syriac version has the "blessed or consecrated gift."† But if there could yet remain a shadow of doubt as to the true interpretation, it would vanish at the statement of St. Dionysius the Areopagite, from whom we learn that, in the early Church, as many communicated as were present at the consecration.‡ Among the decretals registered by Gratian is one, ascribed to Pope St. Anacletus, ordering Daily Communion to the faithful, alleging, as a reason, the commands of the Apostles, and the unvarying practice of the Church of Rome down to his time.§

421. This praiseworthy usage endured for many centuries in the Church of God, as may be inferred from the passing remarks of the Holy Fathers. St. Cyprian speaks as follows:—"All Christians daily partake of the Eucharistic Bread, as of the Food of Life Everlasting;" and he adds, that "by the words *give us this day our daily bread*, they begged to be guarded from the faults which might hinder this daily Communion, and which might debar them from partaking of the Body of their Saviour."‖ St.

* Erant autem perseverantes in doctrinâ apostolorum et communicatione fractionis panis. Quotidie quoque perdurantes unanimiter in templo et frangentes circa domos panem, sumebant cibum cum exultatione et simplicitate cordis collaudantes Deum et habentes gratiam ad omnem plebem. Act. ij. 42, 46.

† Frangentes munus benedictum.

‡ In primâ ecclesiâ quotquot inerant consecrationi Eucharistiæ, communicabant eidem. Hierar. Eccles., cap. 13.

§ Peractâ communione, omnes communicent, qui noluerint ecclesiasticis carere liminibus. Sic enim et Apostoli statuerunt et Sancta Romana tenet Ecclesia. Apud Gratian. De Consid., Dis. 2, cap. Peracta.

‖ Panem quotidianum da nobis hodie. Hunc panem dari nobis quotidie postulamus, ne qui in Christo sumus, et Eucharistiam quotidie ad cibum salutis accipimus, intercedente aliquo graviore delicto, dum abstenti et non communi-

Jerome, writing to Lucian, says that, in his days, the praiseworthy custom of daily Communion was still in vigour in the Churches of Rome and of Spain.* Then, frankly expressing his own view, he approves of this frequency of Communion, which gives us, in the words of the Psalmist, to *Taste and see that the Lord is sweet*, provided only conscience reproach us with no fault which may hinder or interrupt this divine converse.† In his letter to Pammachius he repeats his witness as to the practice of daily Communion being still kept up in the Church of Rome.‡

422. St. Basil states that to communicate daily, to partake every day of the Body and Blood of Jesus, is good and wholesome, as Christ Himself has said, *Whoso eats My flesh and drinks My blood shall have everlasting life.*§ St. Ambrose, treating of the Holy Eucharist, would have us receive it daily. "Receive daily this Sacred Food, that it may daily strengthen thee. Live so, however, as to deserve to receive it every day." He further observes, that if a person be not worthy to partake of the Sacrament daily, neither will he be worthy after the lapse of a year.‖

423. St. Augustine too wishes, as far as depends on himself, that the faithful should daily receive Holy Communion; and he expresses this desire most unmistakably in these words, "This Eucharistic Bread is our daily bread; partake then of it every day, so that it

cantes a cœlesti pane prohibemur, a Christi corpore separemur. Serm. 6 de Orat. Dominic.

* De sabbato quod quæris, utrum jejunandum sit; et de Eucharistiâ, an accipienda quotidie, quod Romanæ Ecclesiæ et Hispanicæ observare perhibentur; scripsit quidem Hippolytus vir disertissimus et carptim diversi scriptores e variis auctoribus edidere.

† Eucharistiam quoque (puto) absque condemnatione nostri, et pungente conscientiâ, semper accipere, psalmistam audire dicentem: *Gustate et videte quoniam suavis est Dominus.*

‡ Scio Romæ hanc esse consuetudinem, ut fideles semper Christi corpus accipiant.

§ Communicare per singulos dies, et participare de sacro corpore et sanguine Christi, pulchrum est, et valde utile ipso manifeste dicente: *Qui manducat meam carnem et bibit meum sanguinem, habet vitam æternam.* Epist. ad Cæsariam Patritiam.

‖ Accipe quotidie, quod quotidie tibi prosit. Sic vive, ut quotidie merearis accipere. Qui non meretur quotidie accipere, non meretur post annum accipere. Lib. v. De Sacramentis, cap. 4.

may help thee every day."* It is true that in a letter to Januarius the holy Doctor says that this praiseworthy usage was already beginning to cease in several parts of Africa, where some approached the Lord's Table daily, while others abstained. And he relates the reasons given by both for their conduct in this respect. And this, I believe, is the real cause why he should have expressed himself in these memorable words: "I neither approve nor condemn daily Communion."† For while he desired, as he had already declared, that the faithful should daily feed on the Body of our Blessed Lord, as he was aware that some were opposed to so holy a usage, he did not wish openly to impugn their way of thinking.

424. Having set forth these authorities, we come to our conclusion. We say, then, that daily Communion, introduced as it was by the Apostles in the infancy of the Church, practised for many centuries in the Universal Church, and recommended and promoted by so many of the gravest Fathers, if considered in itself, and apart from the dispositions of individual receivers, is not unbecoming, and may not, without rashness, be condemned in any description or class of persons; for, were it in itself deserving of blame, it could neither be practised praiseworthily, nor have been advised at any period of history.

425. It is true that in course of time the custom of daily Communion gradually disappeared throughout Christendom. Hence it was necessary that Pope Fabian should command the faithful to communicate thrice a year—at Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost. Finally, things came to such a pass that Innocent III., in the Fourth Lateran Council, decreed that all the faithful should approach Holy Communion at least once a year, at Easter or thereabouts, and that the transgressors of this precept, in punishment of their contumacy, should be interdicted from entering the church.‡ Such is the account given by St. Thomas.§ The holy

* Iste panis quotidianus est: accipe quotidie ut quotidie tibi prosit. De Verb. Dom. Serm. 28.

† Quotidie Eucharistiæ communionem percipere nec laudo, nec reprehendo. In Lib. de Eccles. Dogm.

‡ Cap. 21.

§ In primitivâ ecclesiâ, quanda magna vigebat devotio fidei christianæ, statutum fuit, ut quotidie fideles communicarent. Unde Anacletus papa dicit:

Council of Trent renewed the same decree.* The falling away of this practice by no means proves that, of itself, daily Communion is not as praiseworthy and commendable as it ever was, but only that we have degenerated from the piety of earlier days, and that the fervour of charity has grown cold. This may be plainly seen by a most convincing comparison. Nowadays, Christians do not part with their goods, or strip themselves of their possessions and put them into a common stock, as was the custom of those first fervent believers. Neither are the faithful knit together now by the bond of so tender a love, that it may be said of them *They have but one heart and one soul*, as is recorded of the faithful of those happy days. Now, what conclusion is to be drawn from this? Is it that such heroic renouncement of wealth and this so excellent charity, are not to be accounted as great virtues, or should not be greatly commended in those who would practise them nowadays? Assuredly not. All that we can infer is, that the ancient fervour has waxed cold, and the earnest desire of perfection which animated the early Christians has been extinguished within us. The same, too, may be said of daily Communion: what holds good in respect of the former point holds good in this too.

426. And the truth of what we say is plainly shown by the decisions of Holy Church in these latter times concerning daily Communion. The holy Council of Trent, which was held in days very like our own, not only commended daily Communion, but expressed its desire to see it become general among the faithful. Mark well its exact words: "The Holy Synod would indeed wish that at each Mass the faithful who are present should

Peractâ consecratione, omnes communicent, qui noluerint ecclesiasticis carere limnibus: sic enim et Apostoli statuerunt, et sancta Romana tenet Ecclesia. Postmodum vero, diminuto fidei fervore, Fabianus papa indulsit ut si non frequentius, saltem ter in anno, omnes communicent, scilicet in Paschâ, Pentecoste et Natali Domini. Soter etiam papa in cœnâ Domini dicit esse communicandum, ut habetur in decretis de cons. dis. 2. Postmodum propter iniquitatis abundantiam, refrigescente caritate multorum, statuit Innocentius III. ut saltem semel in anno, scilicet Paschâ, fideles, communicent. 3 part. quæst. 21, alias 80, art. 10, ad 5.

* Sess. xiij., Can. 9.

communicate, not only spiritually and in desire, but really and sacramentally, in order to obtain the fruits of this most holy Sacrifice." * In the Roman Catechism, which the same Council ordered to be drawn up, and which was published by order of St. Pius V., daily Communion is not only approved of, but pastors of souls are commanded to propagate it among their flocks. "It will be the duty of the Parish Priest," says the Catechism, "frequently to exhort the faithful, that as they know it to be necessary daily to supply their bodies with food, so must they not be careless of daily feeding and nourishing their souls with this Sacrament." †

427. In proof of what we advance, Cardinal de Lugo quotes a declaration of the Sacred Congregation of the Council of Trent,‡ of A.D. 1597, in the month of January, occasioned by a Bishop who was thinking of forbidding his Curates to administer Communion to the people more than three times a week, namely on Sundays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, with a view to inculcate greater reverence for the Sacrament, and to hinder its too familiar use. The Congregation decided against his taking this step, on the ground that in early times, every one partook of Holy Communion after Consecration, and that hence daily Communion could not be deemed unlawful.§ The learned Cardinal infers from this, that there is no question but that of itself Communion day by day is most praiseworthy, and to be preferred to a less frequent use. He adds, that this is a truth of which no Catholic can reasonably entertain a doubt.‖ We may hence conclude, that

* Optaret quidem Sacrosanta Synodus, ut in singulis missis fideles adstantes, non solum spirituali affectu, sed sacramentali etiam Eucharistiæ perceptione communicarent, quo ad eos sanctissimi hujus Sacrificii fructus perveniret. Sess. xxij., cap. 6.

† Parochi partes erunt, fideles crebro adhortari, ut quemadmodum corpori singulis diebus alimentum ministrare necessarium putant; ita etiam quotidie hoc Sacramento alendæ et nutriendæ animæ curam non abjiciant. De Euchar., num. 9.

‡ De Euchar. Dis. xvii., sect. 1.

§ Obstare, quia antiquo tempore peractâ consecratione, omnes adstantes Eucharistiam sumebant: et ideo licitum est quotidie Eucharistiam sumere.

‖ Non dubitari an usus quotidianus Eucharistiæ de se laudabilis sit, et perfectior, quam usus rarior, atque ideo curandum omnibus esse, ad illum pervenire, si possint. Hoc enim sub his terminis adeo certum est, ut nemo

Communion on each successive morning, considered in itself, is most commendable, not only in Religious, but in seculars; and that the authority of the early Fathers, the practice of the primitive Church, and the mind of the modern Church, render it impossible to blame it without incurring the note of temerity.

CHAPTER V.

THE PRACTICAL RESULTS OF THE DOCTRINE DEVELOPED IN THE FOREGOING CHAPTER CONCERNING DAILY COMMUNION.

428. DIRECTORS of souls might perhaps object: If, as you assert, daily Communion be so profitable and to be recommended to the faithful of either sex, we ought to admit daily to the Lord's Table both men and women, married and single, tradespeople, artisans, labourers, and all who attend at the Holy Sacrifice. But what disorders would result therefrom, what abuses, what indecencies, nay, what profanation of this Divine Sacrament! To this we reply, that such is in no way our meaning. It is one thing to assert that daily Communion is praiseworthy and desirable for every one, and quite another thing to urge its practical adoption on all indiscriminately. And here we may allege the Angelic Doctor, who clears up this point, and sets forth in a practical aspect the solid and well-grounded principles which we have so far been developing. He says, that Holy Communion may be considered in two ways, either as regards the sacrament received, or as regards the person receiving. Under the former point of view, there can be no question but that it is most praiseworthy to receive it daily, were it only for the great advantages that will result therefrom to pious souls. And in this sense it is that we have all along recommended daily Communion. In the latter point of view, when we come to consider the communicant, it is

Catholicorum possit de hoc dubitare. Non expedit prohibere omnes fideles absolute a Communione quotidianâ. Hoc esset prohibere illos ab omni eo, quod est perfectius et utilius.

not fitting that all should receive daily, as to do so presupposes great purity of heart, great reverence and devotion; dispositions which are not invariably to be met with in all by reason of the several weaknesses of mind and body to which our poor human nature is liable.*

429. But as no one is judge in his own case, so no one can determine for himself the frequency wherewith he should communicate, whether daily, weekly, or after longer periods of time. This point ought to be settled by the advice of his Confessor, who, being better acquainted with his inward state, can decide this question with less chance of error. And this is precisely the import of a decree of the Sacred Congregation of the Council of Trent, promulgated according to the mind of Pope Innocent XI., which contains these two prohibitions:—First, that of impugning daily Communion: Secondly, that of limiting Communion in general to certain determinate days.† He proceeds to say that the decision of the question as to whether daily Communion should or should not be allowed, whether Communion should be permitted with greater or less frequency, is to be left to the pastors of souls who, knowing each one's dispositions, may and should be safely guided in their decisions by this knowledge. Lastly, all are exhorted to favour daily Communion, provided it be duly made, and to thank God when they see that it is frequented with devotion, with decorum, and with good results.

430. And here the answer made by St. Catharine of Siena,

* Circa usum hujus Sacramenti duo possunt considerari. Unum quidem ex parte ipsius Sacramenti, cujus virtus est hominibus salutaris: et ideo utile est quotidie ipsum sumere, ut homo quotidie ejus fructum percipiat. . . . Alio modo potest considerari ex parte sumentis, in quo requiritur, ut magnâ devotione et reverentiâ, ad hoc Sacramentum accedat. . . . Unde Augustinus cum dixisset: Accipe, quod quotidie tibi prosit, subjungit: Sic vive, ut quotidie merearis accipere. Sed quia multoties in pluribus hominum multa impedimenta hujus devotionis occurrunt, propter corporis indispositionem, vel animæ; non est utile omnibus hominibus quotidie ad hoc Sacramentum accedere; sed quotiescumque se ad illud homo invenerit præparatum. 3 p., q. 21, alias 80, a. 10, in corp.

† Non ut a frequenti, aut quotidianâ sacræ Communionis sumptione, unicâ præcepti formulâ aliqui deterreantur: aut sumendi dies generaliter constituantur. Cong. Interp. Concil., 22 Feb. Ann. 1679.

to one who took upon himself to reproach her with the frequency of her Communions, is much to our purpose. The public rumour was to the effect that the Saint approached the Altar daily, to receive the Spouse of her soul; which to some afforded edification, while others murmured thereat, as is usual in like cases. One day a Bishop called upon her at her home, and set about rebuking her, with but little discretion, for the frequency of her Communions. And alleging the words of St. Augustine, wherein he says that he neither reproves nor commends daily Communion, the Bishop sought to wean her from her holy practice by the authority of this illustrious Doctor of the Church. The Saint replied, "But, Right Reverend Father, if St. Augustine does not reprove my frequent Communion, why should you?" To this wise and convincing reply the Prelate had nothing to answer, and was obliged to swallow his confusion in silence.* This is related by St. Antoninus. What the Saint implied by her answer was, "If St. Augustine neither praises nor blames daily Communion, inasmuch as such frequency wholly depends on the dispositions of each individual" (the appreciation whereof, as that saint was well aware, concerns Directors), "wherefore does your Lordship, without the least insight into my conscience, thus reprove me?"

431. From all that has been hitherto said we may draw these three conclusions—First; That both daily, and frequent though not daily, Communion, are in themselves most praiseworthy: Secondly; That such a frequency requires proportionate dispositions in the soul: Thirdly; That the Confessor, and he alone, can form a right judgment as to these dispositions and the consequent frequency of Holy Communion to be prescribed—that to him alone it belongs to settle this point. I would, however, beg Spiritual Directors not to yield to groundless fears or to be misled by shallow views, so as to debar those of their penitents whom they may find disposed from frequently partaking of this Divine Food; for, by such a course, they deprive them of the inexhaustible treasures therein contained, of the increase of sanctifying grace,

* Respondit virgo sacra in præsentiâ plurium: Ex quo Augustinus non me vituperat in dictis suis, quare tu, Reverendissime, me vituperas? Sicque confusus tacuit. 2 p. Hist., tit. xxiij., cap. 14, sec. 8.

of the powerful help imparted in this Sacrament to advance in virtue; and further, they grieve the heart of Jesus, whose chief delight is to unite Himself to the souls that love Him, as He declared to St. Gertrude, to whom He complained of those who, without just cause, keep such away from this intercourse with God. "If," said He, "I have made it My delight to converse with the children of men; if, carried away by My love, I have instituted this Divine Sacrament in order to abide with them to the end of time; judge how I must feel offended with those who dissuade persons from frequently receiving Me, with those who debar the faithful from union with Me, and who envy Me those merciful delights which I so earnestly seek for in the hearts of men." *

432. I further add, that a Director, by acting in this matter with excessive and ill-judged rigour, may justly fear some chastisement for the injury he works upon souls, and the offence he does to Christ, their most tender Father. We read in the Life of St. Lutgarde that this once happened to certain nuns in her convent.† The Abbess forbade this saint to go to Holy Communion every Sunday, as was her habit. The Saint replied that she would have obeyed the order cheerfully enough, but that she foresaw most surely the chastisement that Christ would not fail to inflict upon the Abbess, for the offence she would thereby give to Him. The Abbess, making no account of the warning which God gave her by the mouth of His favoured Spouse, persisted in her prohibition, but to her cost: for it was not long before she felt the effects of it. She was suddenly seized with an acute sickness that went on increasing every moment without stopping, until, made wiser by suffering, she had withdrawn her unreasonable command, and left the servant of God free access to

* Cum deliciæ meæ sint esse cum filiis hominum, et ego hoc Sacramentum cum summâ caritate in meam commemorationem fidelibus suscipiendum reliquerim, atque etiam per illud cum eis usque ad consummationem sæculi remanere velim: quicumque aliquos mortali peccato immunes, verbis, vel suasionibus, ab ejus perceptione retrahat, is quodammodo impedit, et interrumpit delicias meas, quas cum illis habere possem. Lud. Blosii, Monil. Spirit., cap. 6, sec. 1.

† Apud Surium., 6 Junii, cap. 12.

her Spouse veiled beneath the Sacrament. Those of the Community who had molested the Saint, on their repentance and humble acknowledgment of their fault, were exempt from all suffering, while such as continued to annoy her, soon died an early death. So true is it that imprudently to keep away persons who are sufficiently prepared from Holy Communion, is to wound Jesus Christ in the apple of His eye. But as it is not easy to determine what frequency of Communion is advisable in every case, we will lay down a few rules founded on the authority of the saints, and on reason itself, which may enable the Director to deal suitably with his penitents in this regard.

CHAPTER VI.

PARTICULAR RULES AND PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS FOR DIRECTORS IN FIXING THE FREQUENCY OF COMMUNION TO BE ALLOWED TO THEIR PENITENTS.

433. First suggestion. As a general rule the Director may, and should, allow weekly Communion to all persons who have the dispositions necessary for absolution in Confession. This is the general opinion of all masters of the spiritual life, and it seems to be the present practice of Holy Church. The reason is plain. Either the penitent lives habitually in the grace of God, or falls now and then into some grievous sin.—I am not now speaking of persons of abandoned life, who do without hesitation whatever they find a will to, for such as these come to Confession but seldom; and the Confessor therefore could not, even if he would, allow them frequent Communion.—If the person be living in God's grace he should not be debarred from receiving Communion, and its benefits, once in each week, besides the principal festivals of the Church, as he is duly prepared for receiving; unless, indeed, the Confessor see fit to impose on his penitent this privation from time to time either for his humiliation or mortification, or to try him, or else to whet his appetite for this sacred banquet. If, on the other hand, the penitent be one who goes on defiling his con-

science with some mortal sin, but yet comes to Confession with such contrition as fits him for absolution, he should still be admitted to Holy Communion in order to draw from it strength and vigour against further relapses; this being one of the proper and saving effects of the Bread of Heaven. Indeed St. Ambrose even says that the fact of our falling into sin is a reason for our frequently communicating; for being sick, we must have frequent recourse to the medicine which strengthens us against the recurrence of our habitual infirmities.* St. Hilary goes so far as to say, that if our sins are not such as to cut us off from communion with the faithful—or to come nearer to our present subject, do not render a penitent unfit for sacramental absolution—he should not be debarred of the healing medicine of our Saviour's Body and Blood; for, deprived of it, he might even be put in peril of his eternal salvation.†

434. Another reason for counselling weekly Communion to these feeble souls is the following: this practice unnerves the strength of the devil, as was explained above, so that he no longer molests them, or else he makes his onslaughts with less fury; thus they gain fresh strength to stand firm in proportion as the might of him who seeks to overthrow them is diminished. And this is the very motive that the holy Martyr Ignatius, a disciple of the Apostles, sets forth in his Epistle to the Ephesians, to encourage them to frequent Communion: "Be careful," says the blessed Martyr, "to meet frequently together for the celebration of the Eucharist, for by so doing you will weaken the power of Satan, and ward off the darts of his temptations."‡ Palladius relates§

* Quotiescumque Sanguis Christi in remissionem peccatorum funditur, debeo illum semper accipere, ut semper mihi peccata dimittantur; qui semper pecco, debeo semper habere medicinam. Lib. iv. De Sacram. cap. 6.

† Si non sunt tanta peccata, ut excommunicetur quis, non debet se a medicinâ corporis et sanguinis Domini separare. Unde timendum est, ne diu abstractus a Corpore Christi, alienus remaneat a salute. Apud Gratian., De Consecrat., Dist. 2.

‡ Date operam, ut crebro congregemini ad Eucharistiam, et gloriam Dei. Quando enim sæpius in id loci convenitis, labefactantur vires satanæ, et ignita illius ad peccandum jacula irrita resiliunt.

§ In Histor. Lausiac., sect. xvij., cap. 19. In Vitâ Macarii.

that a certain woman was transformed by a wizard into the likeness of a horse, by means of incantations. Her husband, afflicted beyond measure at so wonderful a change—the more so as the poor woman refused all food, whether of man or of animals—took his wife to St. Macarius, in order to discover the cause of this melancholy event, and to receive at his hands some suitable remedy. The Saint, who had been already instructed in the whole affair by a divine revelation, had communicated it to his monks before having received any notice from the persons concerned. When the unhappy woman was brought into the presence of the holy Abbot, he sprinkled her with holy water, and restored her to her former shape. He then addressed this warning to her: "Never more leave the church, and abstain no more from Holy Communion, for this great evil has befallen thee because thou hast passed five weeks without approaching the Sacrament of the Altar." The Director may learn hereby how daring the devil becomes with such as keep away from the Eucharistic Banquet, and thus may avoid being too niggardly in allowing Communion to his weakly penitents, provided only he find them sufficiently contrite. I except, however, the case of a penitent having fallen into grievous sin that very day, or the preceding night; for then, however great may be his contrition, it is more seemly that he should abstain from this Divine Food.

435. Second suggestion. If the penitent not only live habitually in the grace of God, but further take great care to avoid all venial sin; if he have no affection to any sin; if he be fond of penance; if he take heed to mortify his passions; if he be given to the practice of devout meditation, have an earnest desire of Holy Communion, and derive from it strength and courage to go forward in the path of virtue, he may be allowed Communion thrice, or even four or five times a week, according as he is found to be more or less advanced in perfection, and in the measure of the greater or less profit which he draws from this Divine Banquet. Pope Gregory VII., writing to the Countess Matilda, a lady of excellent character and natural dispositions, spiritually-minded and devout, proposes frequent Communion as the very chiefest means

of making progress in perfection.* And he adds, "We ought, my daughter, to have frequent recourse to this great Sacrament, as to our most special remedy."† The Director need not, then, fear to be too liberal in allowing Communion when he deals with souls such as these, for such was the conduct of saints of the greatest authority in the Church.

436. If the penitent have attained great perfection, and have already overcome his passions and evil inclinations (mark, we say overcome, not merely lulled them with the opiate of sensible consolations, as is often the case with beginners), if he have acquired, especially by the use of this Sacrament, a great intimacy in conversing with God, which is a mark of the delight which Jesus feels in entertaining Himself with such a soul, he may be allowed Communion every day, as St. Francis of Sales observes, saying,‡ that for daily Communion, we must have already overcome the greater part of our evil propensities, and that leave should be obtained from our spiritual adviser. Palladius relates, that the ancient Fathers, in whom such dispositions may reasonably be presumed, were sometimes compelled, even by the orders of their Superiors, to partake daily of this sacred nourishment.§

437. The Director must not be deterred from so just and reasonable a frequency by the pretexts some allege against it, which is that too common a use of this Divine Sacrament engenders a familiarity which will, in its turn, breed contempt. I say this because persons who are endowed with the qualities already enumerated, will approach this Sacred Banquet with due preparation, and, far from diminishing, will daily increase in reverence for it. For there is this difference between familiarity with earthly persons and with the Saints of Heaven, that intercourse with the

* Inter cætera, quæ tibi contra principem mundi arma, Deo favente, contuli quod potissimum est, ut corpus Christi frequenter accipias.

† Debemus, O Filia, ad hoc singulare confugere Sacramentum, singulare appetere medicamentum. Apud Baron., An. 1074, n. 12, 13.

‡ Introduction to a Devout Life, p. 2, chap. 19.

§ Quod oportet nonnunquam cogere fratres ad refectionem, a Loth accepimus, qui coegit angelos : eo quod oportet, si fieri potest, monachos quotidie communicare sacramentis. Qui enim se ab eis procul amovet, Deus quoque procul ab eo recedit. Qui autem hoc facit assiduo, assidue suscipit Servatorem. Hist. Lausiac., c. 52. In Vitâ Apoll. Abb.

former makes us discover more and more of their shortcomings, while it enables us to penetrate more deeply into the excellences of the latter; so that while familiarity, little by little, undermines esteem and respect with the former, it increases them with the latter. And if the Director has any doubt on this point, let him but cast a glance first at the heart of one who receives not oftener than once or twice a year, and then at one who goes to Communion several times a week. The latter he will find to be full of awe, while the former will be as destitute of taste or relish as if, instead of the Bread of Angels, he were going to partake of his daily food. Thus it is the unfrequency, not the frequentation, of Communion, which destroys reverence and awe for this Divine Sacrament.

438. Third suggestion. The Director will further bear in mind that the rules laid down above are open to many exceptions, on account of the various circumstances in which people may be placed. Thus, for instance, a nun of high virtue and perfection might be well fit for daily Communion, but yet not be allowed it, because, as her companions are in the habit of receiving twice only in the week, such a distinction in her case would be a singularity, and might be an occasion of vain-glorious thoughts, or of murmurs and complaints. With tradesmen or artisans of advanced perfection, a certain measure must be kept, as their many and absorbing occupations hinder them from recollecting themselves during the week as much as would be proper to prepare a fitting reception for the King of Heaven. Neither should we allow the same frequency of Communion to married persons as to an unmarried youth, or to a devout girl, though the perfection in each case be equal; for, while it is quite true that the fulfilment of the obligations of marriage is of itself no obstacle to Holy Communion, still it may occasion a certain unfitness, as, through human frailty, it is usually accompanied by imperfections, defects, and slight sins. But, as it will not be suitable to dwell on so delicate a matter, I will cite the authority of St. Jerome, and leave the Director himself to ponder in silence on the words of the Saint. After having quoted St. Paul's words, *Defraud ye not one the other except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to prayer*, he adds a few reflections in defence of what he had

written elsewhere against Jovinian.* To the authority of St. Jerome, we may add that of St. Thomas Aquinas, who, resting on the words just quoted, and on a passage of St. Gregory the Great, decides this question in terms given below.†

439. The Director must take care, however, not to misunderstand these maxims. The payment of a debt to one who has a full right to exact it, cannot, it seems, be incompatible with Holy

* Paulus apostolus dicit, quando coimus cum uxoribus nos orare non posse. Si per coitum quod minus est impeditur, idest orare, quanto plus quod majus est, idest corpus Christi, prohibetur accipere? Petrus ad continentiam hortatur, ne impediantur orationes nostræ. Quod hic, quæso, peccatum meum est? quid commerui? quid deliqui? Si turbidæ et nebulosæ aquæ fluunt, non est alvei culpa sed fontis. An idcirco arguor, quod de meo ausus sum adjicere: quale illud bonum est, quod corpus Christi accipere non permittit? Ad hoc breviter respondebo, quid est majus, orare, an corpus Christi accipere? Utique accipere corpus Christi. Si per coitum quod minus est impeditur, multo magis quod majus est. Diximus in eodem volumine: Panes propositionis ex lege non potuisse comedere David et socios ejus, nisi se triduo mundos a mulieribus respondissent: non utique a meretricibus, quod damnabatur a lege, sed ab uxoribus, quibus licite jungebantur. Populum quoque, quando accepturus erat legem in monte Sinaï, tribus diebus jussum esse ab uxoribus abstinere. Scio Romæ hanc esse consuetudinem, ut fideles semper Christi corpus accipiant; quod nec reprehendo, nec probo. Unusquisque in suo sensu abundet. Sed ipsorum conscientiam convenio, qui eodem die post coitum communicant. Probet se unusquisque, et sic ad corpus Christi accedat. Non quod dilatæ communionis unus dies, aut biduum, sanctiorem faciat christianum ut quod hodie non merui, cras, vel perinde merear: sed quod dum doleo me non communicâsse corpori Christi, abstineam me paulisper ab uxoris amplexu, ut amori conjugis amorem Christi præferam. Epist. ad Pammach., pro Libro advers. Jovin.

† Dicendum quod coitus conjugalis, si sit sine peccato (puta si fiat causâ prolis procreandæ, vel causâ reddendi debitum) non aliâ ratione impedit sumptionem hujus Sacramenti, nisi sicut dictum est de pollutione nocturnâ, quæ accidit sine peccato, scilicet propter immunditiam corporalem et mentis distractionem; ratione cujus Hieronymus dicit super Matthæum: Si panes propositionis ab his, qui uxores tetigerant, comedi non poterant, quanto magis ille panis qui de cœlo descendit, non potest ab his qui conjugalibus paulo ante hæsere complexibus, violari et contingi? Non quod nuptias condemnemus, sed quod eo tempore, quo carnes Agni manducaturi sumus, vacare a carnalibus operibus debemus. Sed quia hoc secundum congruitatem est intelligendum, Gregorius dicit, quod talis est judicio suo relinquendus. Si vero non amor procreandæ prolis, sed voluptas dominatur in opere (ut ibidem Gregorius usbdit) tunc prohiberi debet ne accedat ad hoc Sacramentum. 3 part., quæst. 21, al. 80, art. 7, ad 2.

Communion, when the payment is made with the pure intention of complying with God's will, which is manifested in the fulfilment of the obligations of our state. But to exact even what we have in strictness a right to demand, may give rise to some unseemliness, and in fact does so, especially when the claim is urged without necessity, without moderation, or a due uprightness of intention. Directors will now easily understand what I wish to convey in terms which are necessarily a little obscure. As a general rule, then, it may be laid down as certain, that as regards Holy Communion we should be more open-handed with the unmarried than with the married; for, as the state of the former is more perfect, according to the teaching of the Apostle, so does their stainlessness usually render them more acceptable to Jesus in His Sacrament; while they, on their part, through the splendour of original purity kept undefiled, are better disposed for union with the beauteous Lily of the Valleys, even our most loving Redeemer.

440. Fourth suggestion. Directors occasionally meet with persons fitted to receive frequently this Heavenly Food, but who refrain, out of humility, through a sense of their vileness and imperfection. Such as these should be warned that humility is indeed necessary for one who would approach to this Divine Banquet, but that, at the same time, the reverential awe which springs from humility must be overcome by love, in order that they may not remain deprived of those fruits of salvation which this Tree of Life produces in our souls. Hence such persons may and ought to consider their unworthiness, but, at the same time, they must go further; they must pass on to contemplate the unspeakable loving-kindness of which our Redeemer gives proof in the Most Holy Eucharist; the singular love which He bears them; and His burning desire to be united with their souls: thus will a mutual affection be kindled, which will embolden them to approach Him with a holy courage. And so much the more (as St. Thomas does not hesitate to affirm), because, this sacrament being the food of the soul, it is praiseworthy to partake of it every day; understanding, of course, the conditions mentioned by him in the same Article, and which are those enumerated by us in the preceding Chapter

n. 419.* We read in the life of St. Bonaventure, that having forborne one morning to celebrate Mass, out of excessive reverence, he was content to be present at the Sacrifice in devout meditation on Christ's Passion. An Angel took a particle of the Host from the altar and laid it on his lips. From this the Saint learned that it was more pleasing to God to approach the Eucharistic Table with loving awe, than to abstain out of excessive fear. As Blosius well puts it, it is by no means blameworthy, when we abstain at times from this Bread of Heaven, out of a certain holy fear and humble reverence; but it is far better, and more worthy of praise, to receive it frequently, under the impulse of love and devotion.†

CHAPTER VII.

A BRIEF TREATISE ON SPIRITUAL COMMUNION, BY WHICH DEVOUT PERSONS MAY SUPPLY THE WANT OF SACRAMENTAL COMMUNION.

441. THERE being but few, as I have just now said, to whom the daily sacramental reception of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, under the species of bread, may be allowed, all should endeavour at least to receive it in the way that is styled Spiritual Communion; which, as St. Thomas defines it, consists in a lively desire of partaking of this most Holy Sacrament.‡ "To eat spiritually of Jesus Christ, concealed under the sacramental veils, is to believe in

* Hoc Sacramentum est cibus spiritualis: unde sicut cibus corporalis quotidie sumitur, ita hoc Sacramentum quotidie sumere, laudabile est. 2, 2, q. 80. art. 49, ad 1.

† Laudabile quidem est interdum ex humilitate, ac sancto timore, seu reverentiâ, abstinere a sacramentali perceptione Eucharistiæ; sed multo melius est ex charitate, et divinæ laudis, bonique communis desiderio, sive ex speciali devotione, frequenter ipsam sacram Eucharistiam accipere. Monil. Spir., cap. 6, s. 8.

‡ Dicuntur baptizari, et communicari spiritualiter, et non sacramentaliter, illi, qui desiderant hæc Sacramenta jam instituta sumere. 3 p. q. 21, alias 80, art. 1, ad 3.

Christ with earnest desire of receiving Him in this Sacrament."* And this is not merely a spiritual partaking of Christ, but a spiritual receiving of the sacrament itself. When such desires are very earnest and very fervid, a Communion thus made in spirit will sometimes be more acceptable to God, and more profitable, than many sacramental Communions made lukewarmly; and this not through any defect in the sacrament itself, but on account of the want of fervour of the recipient. St. Catharine of Siena, as we read in her life, was so desirous to be united with her Spouse in this Sacrament, that the ardour of her desire threw her at times into sweet ecstasies; and she used to beg her Confessor, the Blessed Raymond, to give her Holy Communion at early dawn, fearing lest the intensity of her longings should produce death. These loving yearnings of the devout young virgin were so pleasing to our Lord, that one day, while Blessed Raymond, celebrating Mass, was in the act of breaking the Sacred Host, a particle of it flew away from his hand and placed itself on the tongue of the Saint, who was present at the Sacrifice. And in this manner did our Lord satisfy the ardent desire of His spouse.† The like also befell a certain nun at Venice, who was longing for Holy Communion.‡ Not being able to receive on the feast of Corpus Christi, she sent word to the great Patriarch St. Lawrence Justinian to signify her desire, and to beg him at least to remember her at the holy altar. While the Saint was celebrating in the public church before all the people, this nun saw him come into her cell with the adorable Eucharist, and present to her with his own hands the Body of the Lord. Whether this is to be explained by the bilocation of the Saint, or by his appearing within the monastery in spirit, cannot be affirmed. Two points only are certain:—first, that the Saint remained at the altar during the whole celebration, and after the elevation was seen to be rapt in ecstasy for a long time; secondly, that when questioned as to

* Contingit spiritualiter manducare Christum, prout est sub speciebus hujus sacramenti, in quantum scilicet aliquis credit in Christum, cum desiderio sumendi hoc sacramentum. In corp.

† S. Anton, 3 p. chron., tit. 23, c. 14, s. 8.

‡ Ber. Just., In ejus Vitâ, c. 8.

the matter, he did not deny the fact, but only imposed a rigorous silence on those to whose knowledge it had come. I have cited these examples in order to show how agreeable to Christ are these spiritual Communions, since, at times, He works miracles to unite Himself really with the souls of those who have an ardent desire for this union.

442. These spiritual Communions may be frequently repeated, even a hundred times a day, and that too with great fruit, as the devout soul may often cast itself in affection on Jesus in the sacrament, and desire to receive Him and to be engrafted upon His most sacred Body. The holy Martyr Ignatius, in his Epistle to the Romans, writes as follows:—"I desire not the vain and passing pleasures of this world. I yearn only for the Bread of Heaven, the Bread of God, the Bread of Life, which is the Flesh of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God. I thirst only for the Blood which is Love Incorruptible and Life Everlasting." * In like manner may a devout person go through the day, saying, while his eyes meet the frail objects of this visible world, delightful and enchanting as they are in outward appearance, "I care not for the pleasures, the riches, the beauties, which this world offers to its votaries; † my sole desire is to receive my Saviour, Who is the joy of the Angels, an inexhaustible store of riches, the flower of all loveliness: I have no other desire but to partake of that glorified Body which gladdens Paradise with its brightness, of the Blood shed for me, of the Soul breathed out for me on the Cross, of the Godhead which is the well-spring of every blessing. As St. Bernard says, 'Let my meat be Jesus, and let me be His meat.' ‡ For He yearns to become one body with me in this most Holy Sacrament, and I with Him." Such desires will enable us continually to make our spiritual Communions again and again; and they will be the more perfect and profitable as the fervour of our longings for Jesus in this sacrament increases.

* Non voluptates hujus mundi desidero; sed panem Dei, panem cœlestem, panem vitæ, qui est caro Jesu Christi Filii Dei vivi; et potum volo sanguinem ejus, qui est dilectio incorruptibilis, et vita æterna.

† Non voluptates hujus mundi desidero, sed panem Dei, panem cœlestem, panem vitæ.

‡ Cibus meus Christus est, et ego ejus. Serm. 71 in Cant.

443. It is, however, advisable to make the spiritual Communion once in each day, at leisure, without hurry, and with special preparation; in order that, being made with greater devotion and fruit, it may to a certain extent compensate for the want of sacramental Communion. Now, no time can be better suited for this purpose than while we are hearing Mass; for then we can unite ourselves with the person of the Priest, that we may thus receive in desire the Divine Food which he is receiving in reality. We should, then, begin with an act of contrition, and thus cleanse the chamber of our hearts, where, as we hope, our dear Lord is about to take His rest. Next, we should renew our faith in the real presence of Christ in this all-holy sacrament. Then we come (as was said above in treating of preparation for sacramental Communion) to the consideration of the greatness and majesty of Him who lies concealed under the veil of the accidents: we ponder the love, the unspeakable goodness which disdains not, but ever yearns, to be united with us; and we cast an eye upon our own misery and vileness. Hence will flow mingled sentiments of humility and desire:—of humility, at the sense of our own vileness; of desire, in beholding the infinite loveliness of our Lord. Next, as this morning we are hindered from uniting ourselves really with Him by means of sacramental Communion, we abandon ourselves in heart to Him, and link ourselves to Him with the bonds of a calm and tranquil love. Lastly, we break out into affections of thanksgiving and praise: for though Christ has not entered bodily within our heart, yet the hindrance was not on His side. He for His part was ready, and even longed intensely, for this loving union. We next beg the grace of which we feel ourselves to have need, and go through the other acts which are usual after Communion. In addition to the immediate benefits which we are sure to gain on the spot from such spiritual Communions, this further advantage will result, that we shall be better prepared to be inflamed with devotion whenever occasion offers of approaching the Eucharistic Table, to feed in reality on the Redeemer's Body and Blood. For even as a log of wood kept constantly in a heated atmosphere, is always ready to be kindled when fire is applied; so, too, a heart which keeps up the ardour of its love for Jesus in the

Eucharist, is always ready to burst forth into flames of charity on drawing nigh to that furnace of love which is ever burning in this most Holy Sacrament.

444. I will here subjoin a narrative which will serve to show how acceptable to our Lord are these spiritual Communions, and will also indicate how we should dispose ourselves for them, so that they may be more pleasing to Him. Father Master John Nider, of the venerable Order of Preachers, relates* that in the city of Nuremberg there was a man of low condition but blameless life, of single-hearted character, with pious inclinations and habits of meditation on the sufferings of our Lord, and familiar with works of charity and mortification of his body. He felt an ardent longing for Holy Communion ; but as in his town it was not usual for men to frequent the sacraments, he kept back from the Holy Table in order not to be singular and to avoid general notice. Being meanwhile fully aware that God accepts not only our good deeds, but also our good will, he sought to make up for sacramental Communion, by the spiritual practice of holy desires. As the day upon which he wished to receive came near, he prepared himself beforehand by fasting. He spent the morning in holy meditations, and in the course of his prayer became inflamed with desire of this Heavenly Banquet ; he cleansed his conscience by an exact Confession of his minutest failings ; and lastly, hearing Mass, he united himself so firmly with the Priest, that at the moment of the Communion, just as though he were himself about to communicate, he bowed down his head, struck his breast, and opened his mouth, as if to receive the sacred particle. What is truly wondrous, as he opened his mouth, he felt the sacred Host placed on his tongue, and at the same time an unspeakable sweetness filled his whole soul. Thus did God reward the lively faith, and satisfy the holy cravings, of His faithful servant. One morning, however, not trusting his own feelings, the good man put his finger into his mouth in order to prove, by the touch of his hand, the reality of what he had so often felt both with his tongue, and with the inward delight of his soul ; and the sacred particle remained attached to the finger. Thus still more

* In Formic., lib. 1.

certified of the truth, he reverently replaced and devoutly consumed it. This act, however, so unbecoming in a layman, and the want of faith which he had shown by it, being displeasing to God, our Lord did not again come to visit him, as He had previously done with such marvellous condescension; although there was no lessening of reverence and devotion for the Blessed Sacrament, and although the person continued to persevere constantly in the same holy life. Our readers may learn by instances such as these, the esteem in which spiritual Communion should be held, and to prepare themselves carefully for it at least once a day; so that they may make this exercise in a manner at once more acceptable to our Lord and more profitable to themselves. Directors, too, may be urged to teach this method to their penitents, and to satisfy by this means the cravings of those who would wish to approach the Holy Table more frequently than is expedient.

ARTICLE XI.

Tenth means of attaining Christian Perfection.—Devotion to the Saints, and especially to the Blessed Virgin.

CHAPTER I.

DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN A MOST EFFICACIOUS MEANS, AND, MORALLY SPEAKING, NECESSARY, FOR THE ATTAINMENT OF ETERNAL SALVATION EVEN IN ITS LOWEST DEGREE.

445. WHAT will be said of devotion to the Blessed Virgin in this Article, will, in its measure, apply to devotion to the other saints, and serve to promote it; for, although the saints cannot prevail so much on our behalf with our Lord as His own Mother, they still possess a great influence with Him, in proportion to their dignity and merits. Concerning this devotion we may

venture to assert, that it is a means most efficacious, and, in the usual course of things, even necessary, not only for attaining salvation by a Christian life, but still more for making great progress in the perfection of a Christian. Because, the self-same reasons which holy writers adduce to show that devotion to the Queen of Heaven is an efficacious means to gain eternal salvation, also prove clearly that this devotion is a most powerful instrument for securing salvation in its perfection; that is to say, for obtaining a great increase of grace and of charity, and a high degree of glory in Heaven. The present Chapter will be occupied with the consideration of Devotion to Mary as an effectual means of obtaining life everlasting in itself. In the following Chapters we shall show its efficacy as a means of reaching eternal life in its perfection, which is the main object of the present work.

446. It is the general opinion of holy Doctors that devotion to the Queen of Heaven, and a special drawing to her, are a clear sign and mark of predestination to glory, with which those are sealed who are one day to enter into possession of everlasting bliss. It is to be compared to the seal with which the Angels sealed the foreheads of the elect, according to the vision granted to St. John in the Isle of Patmos.* I do not say that the predestination of such as make profession of devotion to our Lady precisely consists in this devotion; I say only, that it is a mark or token which indicates this predestination, and usually accompanies it, according to the remark of St. Bonaventure: "Whoever wins Mary's favour by means of a genuine devotion to her shall be recognised amidst the hosts of the heavenly citizens."† But this mark of devotion, he continues, "will cause him who bears it to be enrolled in the book of life." In this sense is such devotion a mark of predestination, that it leads to it, and it usually goes along with it.

* Ecce ego Joannes vidi alterum angelum ascendentem ab ortu solis, habentem signum Dei vivi, et clamavit voce magnâ quatuor angelis, quibus datum est nocere terræ et mari, dicens: Nolite nocere terræ et mari, neque arboribus, quoadusque signemus servos Dei nostri in frontibus eorum. Apoc. vij. 1.

† Qui acquirunt gratiam Mariæ, cognoscuntur a civibus paradisi; et qui habuerit hunc characterem, adnotabitur in libro vitæ. In Psalterio.

447. It would seem that the Holy Ghost Himself invites us to embrace this belief, by those words which are applied to the Blessed Virgin not only by Commentators, but even by Holy Church herself on her greater solemnities. "He who finds me by means of sincere devotion to me," are the words put into the mouth of our Lady, "finds not gold nor perishable diamonds, but rather an inestimable treasure;"* finds the glory of paradise, which is an immortal delight, as Cornelius à Lapide explains it.† To Mary, rather than to Eve, is due the title of Mother of the Living, says St. Anastasius; for if to our first luckless Mother so great a name was given, for having imparted to us a mortal life, much more should this illustrious title be given to Mary, the Second Eve, and our most happy Mother who obtains for those devoted to her the life of grace and of glory, and is to them an assured pledge of predestination to everlasting bliss.‡

448. From this sublime function, which belongs to the Blessed Virgin, of procuring to such as honour her with filial affection the life of grace and of glory, the holy Doctors infer the following consequences, which are most consoling for such as are truly devout to her. St. Anselm, quoted by St. Bonaventure, after saying that it is impossible for any one to be saved from whom Mary averts her face, as being destitute of devotion to her, goes on to assure us that it is likewise impossible for any one to be lost who lives under her protection, and is regarded by her with a favourable eye.§ This assertion of the saintly Doctor may be illustrated by a comparison drawn from St. Epiphanius, which is applicable to our purpose.‖ The Saint mentions a certain bird, called the "Caradin," which, when in presence of a man sick unto death, turns aside its head and

* Qui me invenerit, inveniet vitam, et hauriet salutem a Domino. Prov. viii. 55.

† *Qui me invenerit, inveniet vitam:* hoc est, inveniet vitam gratiæ et gloriæ

‡ Beata Virgo, nova Eva, Mater Vitæ appellata, permanet ad primitias vitæ immortalis omnium viventium. Serm. de Deiparâ.

§ Sicut, O beatissima Virgo, omnis a te aversus, et a te despectus, necesse est ut intereat: ita omnis ad te conversus, et a te respectus, impossibile est ut pereat. In Specul., c. 3.

‖ Physiologor., cap. 25.

looks away from him; while, if the patient be in a fair way of recovery, the bird fixes its eyes complacently upon him. Thus a look from this animal is a presage of life to the sick person, while, if the look be refused, it is an omen of impending death. Whether or not any such bird exists, certain it is, as St. Anselm says, that it is the property of the Blessed Virgin to give life to those on whom she looks with a favourable eye, and to foreshow the eternal doom of those from whom she withdraws her loving gaze. Nor is St. Anselm alone in thus declaring to Mary's devout clients their singular good fortune, or in foretelling the dire lot of those who neglect her service. Other saints are of the same mind, especially St. Antoninus, who states as much in the self-same words.* And thus we may gather from his lips an awful denunciation of the woes awaiting such as are not devout to Mary, from whom she averts her kindly gaze, and further, we may gather an assurance of glory for her devout servants, on whom she casts her eyes beaming with tenderness.

449. Nor should the reader look upon these sayings of the saints as mere pious exaggerations, and unreal hyperboles; they were uttered with calm consideration, and a solid conviction of their truth. For the propositions set forth above, if rightly understood, are strictly true; as shown by Mendoza.† Not that they are to be taken as meaning that the Blessed Virgin will save by her protection those slothful and base souls who refuse to be at the pains of working out their own salvation. For it is plain that, as a ship, with favourable winds driving it into the haven for which it is destined, may possibly not avail itself of them, and may be dashed on the rocks, or be grounded on quicksands, or be sunk through the violence of the storm; so too may any one turn to an evil use the favours he receives at the hands of the Blessed Virgin, and, despite her protection, suffer shipwreck in an ocean of flames. What the saints mean is only this: that the Blessed Virgin obtains efficacious help for such as are devout to her, by means of

* Sicut impossibile est, quod illi a quibus Maria oculos suæ misericordiæ avertit, salventur, ita necessarium est, ut hi, ad quos convertit oculos pro eis advocans, glorificentur. 4 part., tit. 15, cap. 14, s. 7.

† Lib. ij., Virid. Privil.

which they do in fact remain in grace, or speedily recover it when lost, and at length die in this happy state; so that by her favour they prosperously reach the haven of everlasting bliss. The saints, therefore, presuppose a constant co-operation with divine grace, and the Blessed Virgin obtains for her clients the strength to correspond; on this it is that they ground the asserted impossibility of those losing their souls who are devout to her; this is why they regard devotion to Mary as an assured pledge of salvation, an unmistakable token of predestination in all who abide under the mantle of her most faithful protection.

450. This view receives a striking confirmation from a vision vouchsafed to Brother Leo, a familiar companion of St. Francis; as may be read in the chronicles of the Friars Minor.* The Servant of God beheld himself placed, all of a sudden, in the middle of a vast plain, in which there was what had the semblance of the Judgment to be held at that very time and place. Angels were flying to and fro, sounding their trumpets, and gathering together countless multitudes of people. On this vast field were to be seen two high ladders, the one white, the other red, which reached from earth to the skies. At the top of the red ladder stood Jesus Christ, with a countenance full of wrath and of just indignation. On one of the steps, somewhat lower, stood the holy patriarch Francis, who cried aloud, turning to his brethren assembled in great numbers on the plain below, "Come hither, brethren; come without fear; hasten to Christ who is calling you; have faith, and fear not."† Encouraged by these words of their holy Father, the Religious crowded round the foot of the ladder, and began to mount. But lo! some reached the third step, and others the tenth; some advanced to the middle; but all sooner or later lost their footing, and fell wretchedly to the ground. St. Francis, beholding so deplorable a fall, turned to our Lord, and earnestly besought Him to grant salvation to his children. But the Redeemer, showing Himself inclined rather to justice than to mercy, yielded not to the prayers of the Saint. Then the holy Patriarch

* Lib. vj. cap. 17.

† Venite, fratres, venite: ascendite ad Dominum, qui vocat vos: confidite, ne timeatis: venite.

went down a few steps, and drawing nigh to the bottom of the ladder, began to say, with great fervour, "Do not despair, brethren of mine; run to the white ladder, and mount it with great courage; fear not, by it you will enter into Paradise." Whilst he was thus speaking, the Blessed Virgin appeared at the top of the white ladder, crowned with glory, and beaming with gentleness; and the Friars, mounting the ladder, by favour of Mary made their way, and all happily entered into the glories of Paradise. We may learn from this how true was the sentiment of St. Ignatius the Martyr, that the mercy of the Blessed Virgin Mary saves those whom God's justice does not save;* and that hence there is no more efficacious means than that of devotion to her for attaining to everlasting bliss.

CHAPTER II.

REASONS ACCOUNTING FOR THE EFFICACY ASCRIBED BY THE SAINTS TO DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

451. We have now to go back to the well-spring of that inexhaustible outpouring of grace by which the Blessed Virgin ensures the salvation of such as are truly devoted to her; so that the reader may be convinced that it is not without grounds that the saints have attributed such efficacy to devotion to our Lady. To this end, we will begin by laying down the two following principles, which are no less certain than important to be known:—First, that the Blessed Virgin can obtain from God every grace that concerns our everlasting welfare: Secondly, that she is in very deed willing to exercise this power on behalf of her devout clients. Once we have proved these two points, no doubt can possibly remain but that devotion to God's most Holy Mother is a most effectual means of salvation, and may be likened to that favourable wind which wafts our bark into the haven of never-ending delights. We will begin by the first mentioned.

452. St. Bernard teaches that Christ, out of the singular rever-

* Quos non salvat Dei justitia, salvat suâ intercessione Mariæ misericordia.

ence and respect which He professes for His Mother, can deny her no grace, but is most ready to hear her, whatever petition she makes on behalf of us, or of any person in the world.* This is the difference which exists between the patronage of the saints and that of their Queen; their prayers are grounded only on their trust in the mercy and loving-kindness of God, Who has the greatest inclination to show them favour, while her prayers are further based on a sort of right which she has in herself to obtain what she asks; for being Mother of God, she may, in a manner, by virtue of the claims which we may consider her to have upon her Divine Son, obtain whatever she demands in favour of her devout clients. This is the precise teaching of St. Antoninus.† The other saints, says St. Peter Damian, prostrate at the feet of Jesus, being no more than servants, ask suppliantly whatever they desire for our advantage; but the Blessed Virgin presents herself before the throne of Christ as His own Mother, not as a handmaid, and she may, so to speak, command Him as having authority.‡ St. Antoninus, whom we have just now quoted, adds, that Christ cannot do less than hearken to His Mother, not only on account of the reverence due to her from Him, but, moreover, because He has pledged His word to her—having, in the person of Solomon, said, *Ask, Mother, whatsoever thou desirest, for I must not reject thy petition.*§

453. To these authorities from the writings of the saints, may be added an authentic revelation of St. Bridget, which bears witness to the solidity of this teaching.‖ This holy woman had a son of the name of Charles, boyish alike in years and disposition. Having

* Exaudita est pro suâ reverentiâ in causâ tuâ, et totius generis humani. Serm. 3 in Vigil. Nativ.

† Oratio Sanctorum non innititur alicui rei ex parte sui, sed tantum misericordiæ ex parte Dei. Oratio autem Virginis innititur gratiæ Dei jure naturali, et justitiæ evangelii. Nam filius non tantum tenetur honorare matrem, sed obedire, quod est de jure naturæ. 4 part., tit. 17, s. 5.

‡ Accedit ad aureum reconciliationis altare non rogans, sed imperans; domina, non ancilla. Serm. 35 De Nativit.

§ Impossibile est Deiparam non exaudiri, juxta illud, quod in figurâ ejus dixit Salomon matri suæ: *Pete, mater mea: neque enim fas est, ut avertam faciem tuam.* Ubi supra.

‖ Apud Joan. Osor., Tom iv. Concion.

in the flower of his youth adopted the military profession, he soon met his death on the field of battle. The Saint, reflecting on the dangerous time of life in which her son had died, the occasion, the place, the time, and other circumstances of his death, was filled with fear and great anxiety about his eternal lot. But God, Who loved her tenderly, delayed not to comfort her by the following vision :—She was led in spirit to the judgment-seat of the Eternal Judge, where she beheld, seated on a lofty throne, the Saviour Himself, with the Blessed Virgin, as Mother and Queen, at His side. No sooner had she appeared before the divine tribunal, than Satan came forward, and, with a troubled and disappointed air, began boldly to speak as follows :—"Thou, O Judge, art so righteous in Thy decrees, that I trust I shall obtain the whole of what I ask; even though I be Thine enemy, and though Thy Mother plead against me. Thy Mother wronged me in two points on occasion of the death of Charles. The first is this. On the last day of the life of the young man, she entered his chamber and remained there until he expired, driving me away, and keeping me far off, so that I was unable to approach the bed, and ply him with my temptations. This was a manifest injustice, for I have received a grant of the right to tempt men, especially in their last moments, on which depends the loss or gain of the souls which I so much long to make my own. Give orders, then, O just Judge, that his soul return to his body, that I may have yet an opportunity of doing what I can, and of tempting him at least for the space of one day before he die. If he resist courageously, let him go free; if he yield to my efforts, he must remain under my power. The other wrong which I have suffered from Thy Mother is, that when the soul of Charles had quitted the body, she took it in her arms, and herself brought it before Thy Tribunal; nor would she allow me to enter and lay my charges before Thee, although it is my office to prove the guilt of departed souls. The judgment pronounced was, therefore, invalid, for one of the parties remained unheard; and this is against all the laws of God, and even of men." The blessed Virgin made reply to this complaint, that although Satan be the Father of Lies, yet on this occasion, speaking in presence of the everlasting

Truth, he had stated what was correct; but that she had shown extraordinary favour to the soul of Charles because he had loved her tenderly, and had every day recommended himself to her protection; because, too, he had always rejoiced when he thought of her greatness, and had ever been most ready to give his life for her honour.

454. In the end, the Divine Judge pronounced sentence as follows:—"The Blessed Virgin rules in My Kingdom, not as the other saints, but as My Mother, as Queen and Mistress; and hence to her it is granted to dispense with general laws as often as there is a just cause. There was a most just reason for dispensing with the soul of Charles, for it was right that one who had in his lifetime so honoured and loved her should be honoured and favoured at his death." Saying this, He imposed on the demon a perpetual silence as to this case.* From this St. Bridget understood that her son had attained the bliss of Paradise; and the reader, too, may learn what good grounds the saints have for acknowledging in the Virgin a peculiar privilege which is not shared by the other saints, and for regarding it as infallibly certain that she will receive from her Son every grace which she asks of Him on our behalf, especially in all that concerns our salvation.

455. But if our Blessed Lady be thus able to obtain all things from her Divine Son, who can call in doubt that she will employ this great privilege for the spiritual advantage of such as are devout to her? She loves them with a mother's tenderness. She stood by and beheld her Son suffering, racked with anguish, and breathing out His soul for our salvation. She saw Him bathed in His own gore, at the pillar where He was scourged; she saw Him shed that blood to the last drop, on the Cross to which He was so cruelly nailed. She beheld Him torn with scourges for our salvation, crowned with thorns, and bleeding away His life on Calvary. Think, then, how dear to her our souls must be; how

* Mater mea in regno meo principatur, non ut electi, sed tamquam Mater, Regina, et Domina: et proinde potest dispensare in legibus a me latis, cum justa intercesserit causa. Justissima vero fuit causa, ut cum animâ Caroli dispensaret. Sic enim honorandus erat, qui matrem meam tanto dilexisset affectu, et eâ erat morte donandus. Quare super hâc causâ perpetuum silentium dæmoni indictum est.

she must yearn for the salvation of those for whom her beloved and only-begotten Son laid down His life; and especially, with what tenderness she must cherish the souls of such as devoutly honour her, place their trust in her, put no hindrance in the way of her intercession, but, with fervent prayers, beseech her to secure for them, at the hands of her Divine Son, that which she herself so earnestly desires. Think how her heart must melt when she beholds them in supplication at her feet. Can she refuse to exert her immense influence on their behalf? To question this would be to do a grievous wrong to her most loving heart. Hence, as is well said to us by that wise writer who goes under the name of Idiota, the Blessed Virgin is not only able to help, but she does in very deed help in this mortal life all who are devout to her, the bad as well as the good; provided only that they have the will to amend their lives, and to become good. The good she helps by maintaining them in grace; the bad by mercifully leading them back to grace. She assists both at the hour of death, by protecting them from the deceits and snares of their hellish foes. She aids both good and bad, after death, by receiving their souls into the heavenly country.* All which the author whom we are quoting proves by these words of Holy Church: "Mary, Mother of Grace, Mother of Mercy, do thou defend us from our foes, and receive us at the hour of death." And certainly these words bear out the above doctrine.

456. The Blessed Virgin has at times been pleased to show forth, as in a picture, the efficacy of her pleadings in the heavenly court on behalf of such as are devout to her, in order to convince us that she does not allow this sublime prerogative to lie idle, but makes use of it for the advantage of those who honour her. This may be seen in the case of the young nobleman mentioned by Cæsarius.† This unhappy youth, after the death of his

* Adjuvat in vitâ presenti tam bonos, quam malos: bonos in gratiâ conservando, unde canimus: "Maria mater gratiæ;" malos ad misericordiam reducendo, et ideo dicitur: "Mater misericordiæ." Adjuvat etiam in morte ab insidiis diaboli protegendo; et ideo dicitur: "Tu nos ab hoste protege." Adjuvat etiam post mortem, animas suscipiendo; et ideo dicitur: "Et horâ mortis suscipe." In Contemp. Virg.

† Lib. ij. Miracul., cap. 12

father, not content with wasting his goods over theatrical representations, tournaments, and debauchery of every kind, went on to part with his estates, which he disposed of to a wealthy officer who lived near him; and thus he was soon reduced to the direst need. Having no means to support life and to procure common necessaries, he determined, at the instigation of a wicked servant, to have recourse to the devil, in order by this means to regain the possession of his former property. The devil being invoked by the wicked domestic, delayed not to make his appearance; he promised everything, but on condition that the wretched youth should deny God. Hearing these words, the young man trembled and started back with horror; but the persuasion of his depraved menial induced him to pronounce the words of blasphemy. "Now," continued the demon, "you have denied God; but you must go on to deny the great Mother of God." "Oh, not that," replied the nobleman; I will never do that, never; rather would I beg from door to door, feed on wild roots, or die of starvation, than consent to renounce my great advocate, my dear Mother." Indignant at such a reply, the devil took to flight, and the two poor wretches left the wood where this hellish bargaining had been carried on, without having obtained their desire. At the first dawn of day they chanced to pass by a church, the door of which had been carelessly left open. The young man dismounted, and leaving his horse in charge of the servant, went to the high altar, where there stood an image of our Lady with her Divine Infant in her arms. There, reflecting on the wickedness of which he had been guilty, he began to weep so bitterly that the whole church re-echoed with his sobs and cries. And as he feared to call upon the majesty of God, Whom he had so grievously offended, he besought, with scalding tears, the Blessed Virgin to plead on his behalf. While he was thus recommending himself, he beheld the Mother of God turning to her Son, and interposing her prayers on his behalf, while her Son, in wrath, turned away His face. Notwithstanding this, our Lady repeated her supplications, but the Divine Child, turning His face to her once more, said, "What wouldst thou have Me to do with one who has so shamefully denied Me?" At these words,

the Blessed Virgin rose from her place, and laying her Son on the altar, fell prostrate before Him saying, "Pardon him, dear Son, for love of me; he does not deserve this grace, I know it well, for he has outraged Thee too grievously; but I, Thy Mother, deserve it at Thy hands." Then Christ, taking her by the hand, replied, "Arise, dear Mother, I have never refused thee anything, nor will I refuse thee now. For the love of thee, I forgive him." This scene, which passed under the eyes of this unhappy young man, who had kept up a certain respect for the Mother of God and preserved some shadow of devotion towards her, is but a figure of what she is daily doing in Heaven on behalf of her devout clients, and of the great power wherewith she intercedes at the throne of grace for their eternal salvation. So that, as our Lady is both able and willing to obtain for us every grace that concerns the everlasting welfare of our soul, we must be convinced that devotion to her is among the most powerful and effectual means of salvation which we have at our command.

CHAPTER III.

DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN A MOST EFFECTUAL MEANS, AND, MORALLY SPEAKING, NECESSARY TO ATTAIN SALVATION IN ITS PERFECTION.

457. Not only does the Blessed Virgin obtain, as we have just now shown, eternal salvation for those who are devout to her, but she obtains it in such perfection that these happy souls enter Paradise with a great abundance of merits, and an eminent degree of glory; provided that they have the will to apply themselves to the business of their salvation, and are fully resolved to practise the necessary means. For the difference between being saved, and attaining to the perfection of salvation, consists in this, that for the former it is only necessary to live in grace, and to persevere to the end; while perfection requires, in addition, a constant increase of grace, an unceasing growth in all those virtues, whether moral or theological, which form, as it were, a splendid

train accompanying this grace; and especially an increase of charity, in which, as we saw at the very outset, our perfection principally consists.

458. Now, this growth in spiritual life is precisely what the Blessed Virgin obtains for such of her devout clients as are already in the state of grace; since, whether she have regard to her dear Son, or to these just souls, she feels herself moved powerfully to forward their perfection. For if she raise her eyes to her only-begotton Son, she must, for the great love which she bears Him, desire that He be served faithfully and ardently loved, especially by those who more than others are well-disposed for this love and service. And if she cast a glance upon souls such as these, she cannot, on account of the singular love which she bears them—seeing them already adopted by her Son as His daughters and His spouses—fail earnestly to desire their spiritual advancement in all respects. Hence it may be said, that if the eyes of our Lady beam with tenderness for all, they have a peculiar tenderness for souls in grace, so as to procure for them an increase of virtue and merits here, and of glory hereafter. She herself revealed this to St. Gertrude. For, as this Saint was one day in church during the chant of the "Salve Regina," at the passage, "Turn upon us thine eyes full of pity," she heard Mary address to her the following beautiful words: Behold these mine eyes, so full of mercy, which I turn upon all that devoutly invoke me; bringing to them salvation, and procuring them plenteous fruits of life everlasting—that is, a large increase of grace and glory.* Hence St. Bernard was led to say that God has placed in Mary's hand the fulness of spiritual treasures, to the end that we might honour her with a deep and earnest devotion, in the conviction that all increase of grace and glory must come to us through her hands.† In another passage he goes so far as to say, that there is no

* Hi sunt misericordiosissimi oculi mei, quos ad omnes me invocantes possum salubriter inclinare: unde et uberrimum fructum consequantur vitæ æternæ. Lib. iv. De Revelat. S. Geltr., cap. 55.

† Intuemini, quanto devotionis affectu a nobis Mariam voluerit honorari, qui totius plenitudinem boni posuit in Mariâ, ut proinde, si quid spei in nobis est, si quid gratiæ, si quid salutis, ab eâ noverimus redundare. De Aquæductu. In Nativit. M. Virginis.

splendid or lustrous virtue in the world but what proceeds from the Virgin Mary.* So that to her we may aptly apply the words of Wisdom, that through her hands, as through their proper channel, every perfect gift and every spiritual blessing must flow into our souls.†

459. But that this truth may sink the deeper into our hearts, and stir up within them an ardent devotion to this so noble a Mistress, I will copy St. Bernard when making the following most apt reflection. Every one knows what great servants of God were Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Daniel and David, and others whose names are recorded among the worthies of the Old Law. Yet must it be owned that, as a general rule, we do not discern among God's chosen people that splendour of perfection which is now seen in Holy Church. Thus, for instance, in those ancient times, the lily of virginal purity had scarcely put forth a single blossom; while at present we see it flourish not only in cloisters, but even in the midst of the world, unfavourable as this soil is to so lovely a growth. Whom do we find in the elder dispensation despoiling himself generously of all his wealth in order to be more free, and to run with less hindrance the race of perfection! While nowadays we can scarce count those who flock to religious houses, after having stripped themselves of all worldly possessions, and who glory in the poverty they have chosen, more than others boast of their riches. It was once very rarely that a modest violet was found with head bowed down, suffering in silence the outrages of those who trampled it under foot; while in our time we behold many who forgive from their hearts the offences committed against them, suffer insults with unconquerable patience, and even embrace with love the very persons who insult them. Faith is now more lively, as it is more fully established, in the hearts of believers; the homage of religious worship is more constantly paid, charity is more fervent, zeal for God's honour is warmer; because the grace of God which fell, drop by drop, on the heads of the elder Church,

* Ex te procedit omnis armatura fortium; quia nihil est virtutis, quod ex te non resplendeat. Super *Salve*.

† Venerunt mihi omnia bona pariter cum illâ, et innumerabilis honestas per manus illius. Sap. vij. 11.

is now showered down in torrents on the bosom of the Church of Christ, raining in floods to render her fertile in every virtue. But why, then, is God, Who was so sparing with His chosen people, now so liberal towards us? The Blessed Virgin is the cause assigned by St. Bernard. The streams of grace did not of old flow down on mankind, for the heavenly channel which was to draw them down to man by intercession was wanting.* Jesus, it is true, is the fountain-head of these waters of life which spring from His most sacred Wounds; but yet it is also true that Mary is the channel by which these streams flow; for Christ has resolved not to impart them to the faithful, save by the means of His ever-blessed Mother, as the same holy Doctor teaches.† If, then, the Church of God shines with such splendour of virtue, with such lustre of perfection, if there be in it such glory of holiness, it is due to Mary; she being the beneficent channel whereby the grace that renders us holy and perfect is communicated from above.

460. And further, it has been truly observed that there has perhaps never yet been a holy Confessor who did not profess a most special devotion to the Blessed Virgin; and such of the saints as tower above the rest by eminent holiness, are also distinguished by the tenderness of their love for the Queen of Heaven. We have but to read the lives of St. Bernard, of St. Dominic, of St. Philip Neri, of St. Bernardine of Siena, of hundreds whom we might name, among the heroes of Holy Church, to be struck with admiration at the mutual love existing between our Blessed Lady and these saintly souls; to notice how they on their parts honoured her in a thousand different ways, while she, on her side, overwhelmed them with favours, and ever sought to raise them to an eminent degree of holiness. A plain proof that to make spiritual progress, and to scale the height of sublime perfection, we must needs have recourse to this channel of God's gifts, in order that she may fertilise our souls, and dispose them to the practice of every virtue.

* Propterea tanto tempore humano generi fluenta gratiæ defuisse, quod nondum intercederet, de quo loquimur, tam desiderabilis aquæductus. De Aquæd. In Nat. Mar. Virg.

† Totum nos Deus habere voluit per Mariam. Eod. Serm.

461. Of all the saints who, by favour of our Lady, attained to an extraordinary degree of perfection, none, I suppose, was more privileged than St. Mary of Egypt, who, through her devotion to Our Lady, began, continued, and brought to a happy term, the career of her perfection; and by this one and the same means, emerged from the abyss of degradation in which she lay, and rose to the sublimest heights of sanctity. She was, as is well known, before her conversion, a snare which entrapped every heart to enslave it to sin and to the devil; a net of which the demon made use to capture souls, and to people hell. Being one day moved by a powerful impulse from above, she went to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem, which is famous for the relic of the true Cross, there exposed to veneration. On reaching the threshold, she felt herself driven back by some inward force. She returned twice or thrice to the sacred portal, and renewed her efforts to enter, but felt herself as often repelled. The wretched woman was amazed and embarrassed by so strange an occurrence, not knowing whether it was God Who rejected her as unworthy to stand before His Holy Altar, or the devil who was striving to hinder her entrance into the sacred precincts for fear of losing his hold over her. In this turmoil of conflicting feelings and doubts, she went and prostrated herself before a picture of the Blessed Virgin, which was placed near the church-porch, and, as may be seen in the Acts of the Second Council of Nicæa, began to pray as follows:—"Since the God Whom thou didst bear became Man to bring sinners to repentance, help, O Mother of God, a wretched sinner, who, forsaken by all, has none to assist her."* She then promised that, if she were permitted to enter into the church and make her peace with God, she would for ever abandon her guilty pleasures and vanities, and wholly change her life. Having put up this prayer, she again approached the door of the church, and was happily able to go in. Her experience of the tenderness and promptitude of the Blessed Virgin's

* Quandoquidem, ut audivi, propter hoc Deus, quem genuisti, Homo factus est, ut peccatores ad pœnitentiam vocaret, auxiliare mihi soli, et non habenti qui mihi suppetias ferat, etc. Petr. Canis., Lib. v. De Deip., cap. 20. citans Paul. Diac. et Conc. Nicæn. II.

help inspired her with a lively trust in her protection. She went therefore again and again to throw herself at the feet of this good Mother, and to cast herself on her bosom; she took Mary for her advocate, her mother, her guide; and on her part the ever-blessed Virgin clasped her in her arms, and covered her with the mantle of her protection. The Angels, who kept her company in the desert, may tell of the progress made by her under the patronage of the Queen of Heaven; they who kept account of every step she took over its pathless sands, of every sigh with which her bosom heaved, of every tear that dropped from her eyes. We can say no more than that in the penitential and austere life led by her in this solitude, she had no other teacher, no other guide, than the all-holy Virgin, to whom she ever had recourse as to her sole teacher; that under Mary's guidance she prevailed over the most fearful temptations and the most violent assaults that hell could make against her; that she overcame all feeling of weariness, trampled under foot the repugnance of poor weak nature, and persevered constantly for forty-seven years, leaving to the world an ideal of perfect penance, a pattern of the most eminent sanctity: and—what is more to our purpose—a most convincing proof that there is no means more effectual and important than devotion to Mary to raise up any soul, however guilty and full of sin, to the summit of Christian perfection.

CHAPTER IV.

A FURTHER REASON TO SHOW THE NECESSITY OF DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN IN ORDER TO ATTAIN PERFECTION.

462. THE greatest obstacles that spiritual persons have to encounter in the path of virtue, are doubtless the many deceits and temptations whereby the devil, inflamed with envy, seeks to stay their progress. St. Gregory says that the demons lurk on the road

to perfection like brigands and assassins.* They there lie in wait, and rush out upon devout souls, and by their assaults do grievous harm to many; for some, mastered by their formidable attacks, turn back, others go astray from the right path, and others again fall down the precipice. There is a vision related of St. Antony, which is in perfect harmony with what St. Gregory has just affirmed. The Egyptian solitary saw the whole world covered with snares set by our hellish foes to entrap unwary souls. Nor can we question but that the greater part of these snares are set for persons of good will who are aspiring to perfection, since, as the prophet Habacuc says, "Such souls are the prey after which the fiends hunt with the greatest avidity."† So that these poor creatures, surrounded as they are on every side by such formidable foes, are exposed at every step to fall by acts of diffidence, or presumption, or vain-glory, or pride, or anger, or hatred, or lust, or despair; with the danger of losing not only perfection, but salvation itself.

463. Now who shall guide these willing souls along a path so beset with obstacles and perils to the mount of Christian perfection? St. Germanus replies: "It is Mary, who, when her holy name is invoked, will drive far from us the assaults of the devils, and protect us from their formidable attacks."‡ Mary it is who puts them all to flight whenever they band together to assail us. Mary it is who can set at naught the snares which they secretly spread for us, and who, becoming our guide, leads us in safety through the midst of their toils to the height of perfection. And should the reader inquire how this illustrious office is in a special manner peculiar to Mary, why she should have it given to her to discomfit all the enemies of our salvation and our perfection, we have not far to seek for a reply, for she is that valiant woman foreshown by God from the beginning, who is to be our defender

* In præsenti vitâ, quasi in viâ sumus, quâ ad patriam pergimus. Maligni autem spiritus iter nostrum, quasi quidam latrunculi, obsident. Hom. 11. In Evang.

† Cibus ejus electus. Habac. i. 16.

‡ Illa, nequissimi hostis in conservos suos invasiones, solâ nominis sanctissimi invocatione repellens, tutos, et incolumes reddit. In Zonâ Virginis.

against all the assaults of our foes. "I will set an implacable enmity," said God to the serpent in the Garden of Eden, "between thee and the woman, between her Seed and thine. She shall crush thy head."* But who, then, is the valiant woman that, fearless of the serpent's lying in wait, heedless of his venom, shall crush his head. Who is the serpent that shall be thus trampled under foot by this unconquered woman? "The serpent is none other but the devil," says St. Bernard, "while the woman is Mary, the Mother of God."†

464. To overcome, then, all the obstacles that the devils put in the way of our spiritual progress, there is no means more effectual than devotion to Mary, and a continual recourse to her in all the assaults and shocks which we sustain from their temptations; for if Mary but take upon herself our defence—as she most surely will—her protection alone will be to us an impenetrable buckler against all the darts of our foes; of herself she will suffice to put them all to flight, nor will hell banded together against us be able to put the slightest obstacle in the way of our advance in the spiritual life. To this valiant champion is reserved the discomfiture of all our enemies; if only she will do battle for us, our victory is certain. Hence St. John Damascene could say: "Having placed all my trust in thee, great Mother of God, I shall be protected by thee. Overshadowed by thee I will not fear, and armed as with a breastplate by thy protection and all-availing help, I will wage war on mine enemies and put them all to rout. For to be devoted to thee is that mighty weapon which God puts into the hands of such as He wills to love, so that by it they may attain eternal glory."‡

465. In proof of this, we may add the following wondrous

* Inimicitias ponam inter te, et mulierem, inter semen tuum, et semen illius. Ipsa conteret caput tuum. Gen. iij. 15.

† Ipsa Virgo est, quondam a Deo promissa mulier, serpentis antiqui caput virtutis pede contritura. Serm. de Virg. Mariâ. Super verb. Apocal.

‡ Spem tuam habens, o Deipara, servabor; defensionem tuam possidens, non timebo. Persequar inimicos meos, et in fugam convertam, habens ut thoracem protectionem tuam, auxilium tuum. Nam devotum tibi esse, est arma quædam salutis, quæ Deus iis dat, quos vult salvos fieri. Serm. de Annunciat.

event, which will serve to set before the eyes of the devout reader how terrible to devils is the Blessed Virgin, and what care she takes to defend from their snares all those who are devoted to her.* A military man, it is said, had obtained by the favour of the demon, a rich store of gold, silver, and precious stones, on condition that, on the day appointed, and to a place agreed upon, he should bring with him his wife, who was a lady of most blameless life, and most devout to the Queen of Heaven. The soldier, beside himself with joy at gaining so much wealth, ordered his wife to make ready to start on a journey which she was to make in his company. Not daring to question his wishes, the lady decked herself in her best attire, got on horseback, praying meanwhile the Blessed Virgin to be her companion in this journey, for she was full of anxiety whither it would lead her. On their way they chanced to pass a church, dedicated to the name of the ever blessed Virgin. The lady, touched with a sentiment of devotion, dismounted, and, entering, fell prostrate before the image of Mary, and began to beseech her to grant assistance in a journey which filled her with so much anxiety; for, perhaps, through some suspicions of her husband's character, she feared that it would turn to her misfortune. While thus praying, she was overtaken by a sweet and sound sleep, losing the use of all her senses; so that she remained motionless on the spot where she was kneeling. But, behold! a very wondrous thing came to pass. The Blessed Virgin herself, having assumed the outward appearance of the lady, went forth from the church, and without the soldier's being able to perceive the change, mounted the horse and continued the journey in his company. On their arrival at the place appointed, the devil appeared, at the adjuration of the wicked soldier, under the form he had assumed at their first meeting. At sight of the Lady who accompanied him, he began to howl, to gnash his teeth, and to tremble from head to foot. Turning to the soldier, he cried, "Ah! perfidious traitor, instead of bringing me thy wife, on whom I wanted to avenge the injuries she has done me, thou hast brought me my great enemy, even the great Mother of God." "Peace, foul fiend!" replied the Blessed Virgin.

* Jacobus de Voragine, Archiepisc. Geruensis. In Festo Assumpt. B.M.V

"How hast thou dared to think of harming one of my devoted clients? Peace! thy outrageous daring shall not go unpunished. Go back at once into the depths of hell, nor attempt to harm one who devoutly honours me, who faithfully calls upon me, and who lives under the mantle of my protection." At these words, the devil vanished, howling fearfully, and went to undergo the penalty of his audacious attempt. Our Lady then sharply rebuked the officer, and bade him return to his wife, who was still fast asleep in the church. He went trembling, and aroused her from her sweet slumber, and himself from the deadly torpor of sin wherein he was plunged. The reader may learn from this incident how formidable the Blessed Virgin is to the devils, and how ready to defend from their snares those who love her; since she shrank not from shrouding her glory under the outward semblance of this lady, in order to deliver her from the pitfalls in which the fiend had sought to entrap her with such malignant skill.

466. As a crown to the doctrine set forth in this and the preceding Chapters, we may conclude with a most devout sentiment of St. Bonaventure. The Saint says, "that if we would gain the haven of everlasting bliss, amid the storms of the ocean of this life, there are two safe ways, the imitation of Christ portrayed to us upon the Cross, and the example of Mary shadowed forth in the Star. Whosoever sails under this ensign, and follows the guidance of this Star, shall surely reach Heaven and attain a high degree of glory." *

* Quibus auxiliis possunt naves inter tot pericula pertransire usque ad litus? Certe per duo: per lignum, et stellam: idest per fidem crucis, et per virtutem lucis, quam peperit nobis Maria stella. In Specul., cap. 3.

CHAPTER V.

NATURE OF THAT TRUE DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN WHICH PRODUCES THE FRUITS OF SALVATION DESCRIBED IN THE FOREGOING CHAPTERS.

467. As among coins those which are of greatest value are the most exposed to adulteration; and among gems the most precious are most in danger of being counterfeited: so too, devotion to the Blessed Virgin, being one of the most precious of the moral virtues, and the most advantageous for our spiritual progress (as we have seen above), is most liable to be counterfeited; whether by the malice of men, who form to themselves an idea of this devotion which is wholly foreign to the real character of the Blessed Virgin, though in strict conformity with their evil inclinations; or by the craft of the devils, who, with a view to hinder its bearing fruit, suggest a wholly false and distorted notion of it. On this account it is necessary to explain what is the true nature of that devotion to the Blessed Virgin which produces the precious results of which we have treated above.

468. St. Thomas, speaking of devotion to God (as will be seen more fully in the third Treatise), says that it consists in a ready willingness to do whatever appertains to the service, the worship, and honour of God.* This definition proves how great a mistake it is to suppose that devotion can consist in a mere tenderness of sentiment utterly barren of good works, which usually proceeds from the natural temperament more than from grace; though many live on in contented delusion, satisfying their spiritual appetite and nourishing themselves with this counterfeit. Now, to apply this doctrine with due proportion to our present subject, we may say that devotion to Mary consists in a ready will to do her service and to pay her homage. Observe, the service for which this devotion gives us a readiness and a taste is twofold. It may be either *negative* or *positive*, as we shall proceed to explain.

* Devotio nihil aliud esse videtur, quam voluntas quædam prompte tradendi se ad ea, quæ pertinent ad Dei famulatum. 2, 2, qu. 82. art. 1.

469. Negative service, or homage, may be described as consisting in the avoidance of whatever may grievously displease this Queen of Heaven as being a serious offence against her Divine Son. For, as it would be useless to pretend to be a loyal servant of a Queen, and at the same time to wound her deeply by conspiring against the life of her son, so also no one can lay claim to the title of devout client of Mary who falls under her displeasure by renewing the death of her Son Jesus Christ, through the commission of deadly sin. Holy David gave this command to the soldiers that marched against his son Absalom, who had risen against him, and sought to rob him of his crown: "Go forth, go forth, my friends: fight like courageous warriors since you are such; slay, slaughter, put all my enemies to the sword. But beware of injuring, of touching even with your weapons, my dear son Absalom. He is a rebel, I know; he is a traitor: but he is my own son."* With the like words, and with far greater reason, might the Virgin declare to one who would seek to be enrolled among her devout clients, that the first homage which she requires at their hands is to abstain from outraging her dear and only Son. "If you love me, my Christian friends," our heavenly Mother seems to say, "if you aspire to be my devoted servants, my faithful clients, do not insult my Son Jesus by mortal sin. He is the fruit of my womb, the love of my heart. Every offence you commit against Him touches me to the quick. Forbear then from offending Him, for the love which you owe Him, and for that which you bear to me, who am His Mother."† With such words the Blessed Virgin declares that the first homage for which she looks at the hands of her devout clients is, that they most carefully avoid every mortal sin. Failing this, no one can claim to be considered dutiful to the Queen of Heaven, and hence no one can be called her devout servant.

470. What we have been saying is illustrated by what happened to Hugh, a Tuscan nobleman, of the princely race of Ottoni.‡ Having been piously educated by his mother, Virilla, he spent

* Servate mihi puerum Absalon.
† Servate mihi puerum Jesum.
‡ Pucen. In Vitâ.

the early years of his youth in stainless innocence, to maintain which, the tender devotion that he cherished toward the Blessed Virgin much helped him, together with the many devout practices of which he made use in the hope of securing her patronage. But the virtues of youth are like the earliest ears of corn, or the grapes of autumn, which, being exposed to the inclemency of the weather or the storms of heaven, fall off or wither before they have reached maturity; so this young man, on being exposed to the dangers of the court, to the occasions of sin, and the assaults of various temptations, fell miserably into grievous crime, and sullied the white robe of his virginal purity. Once allured by the poisonous sweetness of pleasure, he lost all relish for virtue, and quickly fell headlong into every kind of youthful excess. While leading so foul a life, he felt certain pangs of remorse, whereby his Mother in Heaven sought to rouse him from the deadly torpor of vice into which he was plunged. "What art thou doing, Hugh? what art thou doing?" Such were the words which he heard whispered in his heart. "Thou art hastening along the road to hell! If thou wert to die, what would become of thee? What art thou doing, Hugh? what art thou doing?" To these inward rebukes the young man replied, with a sigh: "I am a sinner, true; but still I am devout to the Blessed Virgin. I have never omitted my prayers, nor neglected the pious practices that I am accustomed to perform every day in her honour. This Refuge of Sinners will not fail me."

471. The Refuge of Sinners did not fail him. She came to his assistance in the following manner, which makes much for our purpose. Having gone to hunt in the Vale of the Arno, he spent the greater part of the day following the game through the plains, over the hills, in the woods, and in the forests. Towards midday, exhausted with fatigue, and fevered with the heat, he set out in search of some clear fountain where he might slake his burning thirst. Suddenly he saw appear before him a charming country-girl, holding a basket filled with the most delicious fruit, but so covered with filth that it was sickening to look at them. The youth, burning with thirst, at the sight of this fresh, ripe fruit, could not refrain from stretching forth his hand to take some;

but seeing the filth with which it was covered, he left it untouched, and, withdrawing his hand, said, "How foolish to put such delicious fruit into so filthy a basket!" Then the country girl, discovering herself to him as the Queen of Heaven, said, "Just such is thy devotion, such the homage which thou payest me; of themselves good and excellent, they are all soiled by thy evil conscience, defiled by thy wicked life. What wilt thou have me to do with them? Hugh, if thou wouldst truly be pleasing in my most pure sight, change thy manners." At these words the Blessed Virgin disappeared, leaving to us, no less than to him, a lesson that we should do well to ponder: namely, that if we wish to be truly devout to Mary, the positive homage we pay her, which consists mostly in prayers and divers acts of virtue done in her honour, does not suffice; but first and before all we must render her that negative homage which consists in freedom from every grievous sin.

472. "If this be so," you may object, "then every one who falls into deadly sin is directly struck off the roll of the devout clients of Our Lady. And how can she be called the Mother of sinners, if she holds them in such abhorrence as to cast them from the embrace of her motherly arms as soon as she sees them defiled with sin? To this I reply that there are various classes of sinners. Some commit sin, and are so attached to their sin that they have no wish to renounce it. Others sin, it is true, but yet in a certain sense hate the sin into which they fall; for even while committing it they are, in a manner, overcome by the vehemence of their passions and the force of the temptation by which the enemy assails them, so that they in a certain measure abhor it, and would wish not to commit it; they desire to amend, and therefore frequently have recourse to the Blessed Virgin to obtain strength to burst asunder the chains by which they are dragged into sin. The former neither are nor can be devout clients of Mary, since by retaining their affection for grievous sin, they are rooted in enmity towards the Blessed Virgin, who is the sworn foe of sin. The other class do not deserve by any merit of their own to be considered devout clients of Mary, but by the prayers which they address to her, and by the homage which they render in the hope of obtaining

deliverance from their bondage to sin, they will, through mercy and grace, become her true clients.

473. This may be made plain by the teaching of St. Thomas. The holy Doctor is inquiring whether God hearkens to the prayers of sinners who live out of His grace; and he answers as follows:—God does not hear their prayers for any merit of their own, or out of any consideration of justice, for as they are deprived of His grace, they are incapable of meriting any blessing at God's hand, nor have they any claim on Him grounded in justice. Yet, adds the same Saint, God does hear their prayers out of pure mercy.* The same may be said of the case before us. A Christian, defiled by grievous sin, cannot claim as a matter of right the title of a devout client of Mary: for his state is such, that not only is he incapable of meriting so great a privilege, but he is positively unworthy of it. Notwithstanding this, however, if he continue to honour her, and if he hope by such practices to obtain his own amendment, the Blessed Virgin will take his good will into account, and admit him among her devout servants; she will help him as a tender mother would do; she will raise him up with her gentle hand from the sink of iniquity in which he lies, and will place him on the path not only of salvation, but even of perfection, if he only choose to walk therein. This is so true that Our Lady herself declared it with her own lips to her favourite daughter St. Bridget, in the following words:—"I am not, my child, the mother of those obstinate sinners who are determined to persevere in their sins, and yet fondly expect that I will save them in spite of the disorder of their life. Of such wretches I am neither patroness nor mother. I am truly the Mother of those sinners who desire to amend their ways, and who have recourse to me, and with fervent prayers recommend their conversion to me."† These, then, are the sinners to whom the Blessed Virgin does not disdain to be a Mother; such, I mean, as desire to amend,

* Orationem peccatoris ex bono naturæ procedentem Deus audit non quasi ex justitiâ, quia peccator hoc non meretur, sed ex purâ misericordiâ. 2, 2, q. 83, art. 16.

† Ego sum mater omnium peccatorum, se volentium, emendare. Lib. iv. Revel., cap. 138.

and who make use of their devotion as a means of rising from their falls, not as an assurance of impunity in sin. Such as these the Blessed Virgin loves tenderly, even as the surgeon loves the diseased limb which he seeks to heal; and as the sculptor loves the rough block which his hand will change into a majestic statue.

474. But further, in order that a Christian may have a right to call himself a devout client of Mary, besides this negative kind of homage, of which we have so far been speaking, he must make use of positive acts. A vassal who pays his prince no other honour than that of abstaining from offering him insult, can by no means be called a devoted subject of his sovereign. To attain so honourable a title he must further render him special and frequent services. So, too, if we are to be really devoted to Mary, it is not enough to abstain from offering to her grievous offence by outraging her Son; we must also honour her with frequent acts of homage. But these being numerous as are the acts by which we render worship, honour, and homage to so illustrious a Lady, it is impossible to specify them all in this short Chapter; it will suffice if we indicate such as occur to our mind.

475. Among the acts of positive homage which may found a claim to be accounted among the devout clients of Mary, we must set in the foremost rank the devotion of choosing her as our Mother, which must be done with a certain solemnity, and at the termination of a fervent novena; and our self-dedication to her should be frequently renewed with filial affection. Thus St. Philip Neri used no other title for the Blessed Virgin than the tender name of "Dearest Mother;" and many other saints have used similar expressions, betokening a tender and childlike love. And this was on account of the real and heartfelt manner in which they had chosen her to be their Mother. Secondly; the daily and attentive recitation of her Office. The monks of the monastery of Gamuga were visited with grievous misfortunes in punishment of having neglected this Office; but were delivered on resuming it at the persuasion of St. Peter Damian.* This incident affords a clear sign of the pleasure taken by the Blessed Virgin in such prayers. Thirdly; to say every day the Rosary, or at least five Decades.

* Baron., Anno 1159.

The favours obtained by the Blessed Virgin for those who have been assiduous in reciting the Rosary are beyond number. I will here only relate what happened one day to St. Gertrude. On finishing the Rosary the Saint beheld at the feet of Jesus Christ as many grains of gold as she had uttered words; and she saw our Saviour place these precious particles in the hand of His Mother, who put them into her bosom, saying that she would, in return, do for Gertrude the same number of favours. Fourthly; to make frequent if not daily visits to some image of Our Lady. This was the habit of Fr. Thomas Sanchez, a man no less illustrious for holiness of life than for extraordinary learning. He never went out of doors without sanctifying his walk by a visit to some church dedicated under the invocation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Fifthly; to prepare ourselves devoutly for her festivals. St. Gertrude saw under Our Lady's mantle a company of most lovely children, on whom she was gazing with a look of unspeakable tenderness. The reason of her love was, that they had prepared themselves with particular devotion to solemnise the Feast of the Assumption. Especially we ought, on the eve of the solemnity, to prepare ourselves by some fast or bodily affliction more rigorous than usual. Thus we read of Cardinal Alexander Orsini that he was accustomed on such days to take the discipline unto blood. Sixthly; to exert ourselves to propagate this devotion among friends, family, and dependents. So acceptable is this care to the Blessed Virgin, that she herself recommended it to St. Bridget—"Strive, Bridget, that thy children may also be children of mine." * Seventhly; to mortify ourselves frequently for her sake, especially by guarding against our accustomed faults. Other such practices may be added, as each one's own devotion may suggest.

476. Among these positive acts of homage the most preferable are those which are performed inwardly; since it is from the heart that the outward acts enumerated above derive their value; so that if any one desire to be a devout client of Mary, he should insist much on these interior exercises. Among the first is to be numbered the cherishing of a truly filial affection towards her. Such was

* Labora ut filii tui sint etiam filii mei.

the love borne her by that truly angelic youth, John Berchmans, of whom it is related that nothing is so frequently repeated in his writings or notes as "I am resolved to love Mary." Secondly; to love her more than one's own life, after the example of St. Brynoth, Bishop of Scara, in Sweden, concerning whom the Blessed Virgin told St. Bridget, that while he lived, he held her dearer than his own life.* Thirdly; to rejoice in heart, and to congratulate Our Lady upon her sublime prerogatives. For nothing is so characteristic of love as to rejoice in the good of the beloved object. Thus when St. Mechtildis felt herself filled with the desire of doing something very pleasing to the Blessed Virgin, she heard the voice of her heavenly Mother, saying, "Rejoice in the privileges which I have received." Fourthly; to thank the Most Holy Trinity for the high gifts which the divine bounty has conferred on the Mother of God. Such a sentiment cannot but be most acceptable to the Queen of Angels; for he who makes this act, shows that he esteems Mary's greatness as his own; since he thanks God for it as for his own. Fifthly; to feel deep compassion for the sorrows which Our Lady suffered at the foot of the Cross. It is no less a sign of love to rejoice in the good of the beloved person, than to grieve for his sorrows, and to suffer when the loved one is afflicted. Hence the Blessed Virgin might well complain of Christians to St. Bridget, saying that few loved her from their hearts, since so few compassionated her in her sorrows. Sixthly; to put all one's trust, next to God, in Mary, to have ready recourse to her in all necessities of soul or body; this was the habit of St. Bernard, that true lover of Mary. "Mary," said he, "is the ladder for sinners to mount to God. Mary is all my hope, all my trust."†

477. Let us then have a ready will to honour the Blessed Virgin, by forbearing from whatever may be a grievous dishonour to her Son or to herself; and by offering to her such acts of homage, whether inward or outward, as are most pleasing to her;

* Hic est, qui me, dum vixit, vitâ habuit cariorem.

† Hæc, filioli, est peccatorum scala: hæc tota mea fiducia: hæc tota ratio spei meæ.

and thus shall we be gathered under the mantle of her protection, and be numbered among her truly devout clients.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MEANS SUITABLE FOR ACQUIRING THIS DEVOTION.

478. Two things render us devoted to the great ones of this world, and ready to do them homage and service. One is the esteem in which we see reason to hold them; the other is the love which we bear to their persons. Now these are precisely the motives which may urge our wills to a ready service of the Queen of Heaven, and so inspire us with devotion towards her. And as the only way of lighting a log of wood is to put it close to fire; so, to enkindle this devotion to the Blessed Virgin within us, no other means exists than frequently to present to our wills, by holy meditation and devout reading, the motives fittest to awaken within us a great esteem and tender love for a Lady endowed with such admirable qualities. If only we frequently consider and ponder the great dignity resulting from her quality as Mother of God—a dignity which, as St. Thomas says,* has something of the infinite,—it is impossible that we should fail to form an exalted notion of her merit. If, further, we reflect in our meditations on the lofty rank which she holds in Heaven, as Queen of the Angels and Empress of the world; if we frequently contemplate the fulness of the grace vouchsafed to her, the eminence of her glory, her wonderful exemption from all sin, whether original or actual, her miraculous virginity coupled with her maternity, and her innumerable other high endowments: this esteem, and this high idea, will grow in us, and ever render us more ready to pay her the tribute of our homage and service.

479. The same course of meditation and reading will enkindle in us that tender love of Mary, the immediate effect of which is to make us serve, and in all things seek to please, the person

* Beata Virgo, ex hoc quod est mater Dei, habet dignitatem quamdam infinitam ex bono infinito, quod est Deus. (1 p., quæst. 25, art. 6.,

whom we love. And, in truth, nothing here below so fires the hearts of subjects with love for their Queen, as to see that she is of a feeling and compassionate disposition; indulgent to those that transgress, ready to plead for their pardon with the King, and of avail to obtain mercy for every crime. Now, these are just the qualities which form Mary's dowry, and, if we only meditate upon them attentively, they will have great power to stir up within us an affectionate love of her. St. Antoninus says, that Mary is that rainbow, the simple appearance of which appeases God when He is provoked by the sins of the world, and is ready to overwhelm it in a flood of evils; the bow which calms Him and staves off His chastisements.* St. Bernard expresses the same idea, saying that "Mary is the rainbow of everlasting peace, which withholds the wrath of God from destroying the whole of mankind."† The same doctrine is also taught by St. Ephrem. "Mary," he says, "is peace between God and man, for she obtains peace for the faithful, by gaining for them the pardon of their sins."‡ No motive can avail so powerfully to inflame us with love for Mary, and so engage us to devote ourselves to her service, as the frequent thought of the gentle compassion and mercy with which she interposes between us and her Son's anger, and stays His hands from chastising us.

480. Of no less efficacy for stirring in us sentiments of loving devotion to Mary, will be the motive set forth in the foregoing Chapters; that is, the moral certainty of salvation, and also of perfection, which every one has who earns a claim to her protection by rendering to her the service which is her due. St. Augustine says, that the Blessed Virgin is the ladder by which God came down to man, and by which also man ascends to God.§

* Ego sum juxta Filium meum, ut cum Deus peccatis hominum diluvio flagellorum minatus fuerit terram subvertere, ego ut arcus appaream in conspectu ejus: et cum recordatus sit foederis, repropitietur eisdem, ne terram dissipet. Part. iv., Titulus 15, c. 4, § Ultim.

† Ipsa est arcus foederis sempiterni, ut non interficiatur omnis caro. Serm. De Laud. Virg.

‡ Ipsa est foedus, pacemque fidelibus impetrans. Serm. De Laud. Virg.

§ Per ipsam Deus descendit in terram, et per ipsam homines ascendere merentur in cœlum. Serm. de Nativitate.

St. Fulgentius employs another beautiful figure to set forth the same idea. Mary is the bridge over which God passed to live with men, and over which men must pass to reach to God, that they may live with Him in everlasting bliss.* St. Bernard says, that Mary was foreshown in the ark of Noah, for, as all who took shelter in the ark escaped the waters of the flood, in like manner all who take refuge in Mary's bosom will surely be saved from the shipwreck of sin, and be led by her to rest in the haven of everlasting bliss.† But St. Anselm makes use of a yet more striking expression, when he says that often salvation is more speedily attained by recourse to Mary than to Jesus Himself.‡ Not—as every one knows—that she can save by her own power, but through the power of her Son, Who, to honour His Mother, imparts to her so great an influence: just as the moon illumines the earth, not with its own light, but with that which it receives from the sun. But, at all events, it is plain how well grounded is the hope, nay, even the moral certainty, of salvation possessed by a truly devout client of Mary, who is assiduous in honouring her by the practices set forth above.

481. But if all this be true: if Our Lady be so compassionate, so kind, so merciful to us, and so anxious for our eternal welfare, how comes it to pass that so few of the faithful who number themselves among her loving subjects can be accounted the devout clients of so great and so kind a Lady? The reason is, that they do not meditate, that they never reflect on these qualities; or at least (speaking of those who are incapable of meditation) they never read books in which her qualities are set forth. For if every Christian would even occasionally consider the splendid gifts bestowed on the Blessed Virgin, and reflect

* Sicut beatissima Virgo pons est, per quem Deus ad homines descendit; ita pons est, per quem homines ascendunt ad Deum. Serm. de Nativ. Domini.

† Arca Noe significavit excellentiam Mariæ. Sicut enim per illam omnes evaserunt diluvium, sic per istam peccati naufragium. Illam Noe, ut diluvium evaderet, fabricavit: istam Christus, ut humanum genus redimeret, præparavit. Per illam octo tantum animæ salvantur: per istam omnes ad vitam æternam vocantur. Serm. de B. Mariâ.

‡ Velocior est nonnumquam salus, memorato nomine Mariæ, quam invocato nomine Domini Jesu. Lib. De Excellent. Virg., c. 6.

how advantageous to them the favour of so great a Queen would be, they would most certainly conceive a great affection for her, and wholly devote themselves to her service. And hence, as we said in the opening, we may assign, as the chief means of acquiring devotion to Mary, frequent meditation upon, or, at least, reading about, the great prerogatives and sublime gifts with which she is adorned.

482. I cannot refrain from relating a wonderful event, vouched by grave authors, which shows practically what has been advanced by the saints concerning the tenderness of Our Lady, and the care which she takes of our salvation.* In the year 1200, a certain nun called Beatrice, of attractive appearance, most fervent in spirit, and most devout to the Blessed Virgin, began to grow tepid by neglecting due caution at the grate of her monastery, in which she was doorkeeper, and passing from one fault to another, from one sin to another, came at last to have nothing of the religious character except the habit which she wore, and even this she determined to cast off, and to flee from the monastery with a young ecclesiastic; so blinded was she by her passion. But before putting into execution her sacrilegious plan, she went to an image of Our Lady, and laid at her feet her habit and her keys. "Mary," said she, "though I leave and forsake thee, do not thou forsake me, but remember the homage which I have paid thee in this hallowed place. Do thou take care of these holy maidens; be thou their keeper. Adieu, Mary, I leave thee." Having said this, she took her flight and left the sacred cloister. Let us leave for awhile this misguided maiden; we shall soon meet with her again. The Blessed Virgin took a form like that of Beatrice in every point—in gesture, figure, stature, complexion, and tone of voice; insomuch that between her and the real Beatrice no difference was found, except that, while the latter was wholly undisciplined and dissipated, Our Lady, under the semblance of Beatrice, seemed the very picture of modesty and reserve. To render the likeness the more complete, Our Lady dressed herself in the very habit Beatrice had cast off, hung the keys at her side, and began to do duty as doorkeeper in her stead. The community knowing nothing of so great a prodigy,

* Miracul., Lib. vij., cap. 35. Theophilus Rainaudus, et alii.

nor having the slightest suspicion of anything of the kind, wondered at the sudden amendment in the conduct of Beatrice. Who could have wrought so speedy a change in her? Who could have altered those looks which were so free, that language so thoughtless, that deportment more befitting a secular than a Religious? One accounted for all this change in one way, another in another. But not one guessed the real truth, that it was not Beatrice herself, but the Blessed Virgin who had assumed the appearance of the guilty Religious. Meanwhile, what befell Beatrice? She was cast off by her companion; and being ashamed to return to her monastery, the unhappy woman went headlong into the abyss of sin, leading an abandoned life for fifteen entire years.

483. In the meantime, she chanced to hear that there was in her monastery a nun famed for great sanctity, who was called by her own name. Moved by curiosity (God so disposing it for her rescue), she resolved to go in disguise, and to discover who this Religious was that was like her in name, but so unlike in her course of life. She therefore went secretly, reached the convent gate, and at it saw a nun exactly like herself. Beatrice grew pale at the sight, and was unable to utter a syllable. The Blessed Virgin was the first to break silence. "Do you know me, Beatrice?" said she.—"No," replied the other in a tremulous voice, "I do not know you."—"Truly spoken," replied the Blessed Virgin, "for you have forgotten both me and my Divine Son. To whom, then, did you leave your habit and the convent keys when you fled from this holy place?"—"To the Virgin Mary," replied the other, astounded at the question.—"I am she," said Our Lady. "To conceal your infamous flight, I have stayed fifteen years doing your work in this place, hidden under your likeness; and while you were leading a life of sin, I have earned for you a reputation for holiness. Come into the convent, and do penance for your grievous sins." At these words the Blessed Virgin disappeared, leaving behind her the habit, which Beatrice resumed at once, and went to join the other nuns. Her flight was never discovered, so perfect was the resemblance borne to her by her heavenly Mother, who had filled her place during the whole of her absence. She did severe penance for her faults; and at

her death enjoined her Confessor to publish this wondrous tale to the glory of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

484. This relation speaks for itself, and shows what is the tenderness, the loving-kindness of Mary, what her anxiety to bring back to God, and to place in safety souls that have strayed; since she could take such trouble to lead back to the fold of Christ this lost lamb, as even to assume her appearance, and to remain thus for so long a period in the convent from which the unhappy nun had fled. This immense mercy of the Blessed Virgin, this great kindness, and her concern for our salvation, should be frequently pondered by the pious reader, who should also meditate on her other high prerogatives; and he may rest assured that such considerations will help him to conceive a high esteem of her, and to acquire that tender affection which will make him ever ready to do her homage, and thus raise him to the condition of her devout client.

CHAPTER VII.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS TO DIRECTORS, ON THE FOREGOING CHAPTERS.

485. FIRST suggestion. If a Director really be desirous that devotion to the Blessed Virgin should enable his penitents to attain salvation or perfection, he must take care that all the acts of piety done by them in her honour be directed to these objects. I say this, because there are many persons who say long prayers to the Blessed Virgin, but only with a view to some temporal interest, or at least without much concern for their spiritual profit. Such as these fail to derive from this devotion the saving effects which it is calculated to produce; for, although it be true that the Blessed Virgin is ready to enrich her devout clients with supernatural gifts, yet she wishes to be entreated, to be supplicated, and sets great store by our earnest persevering prayers, our longings and tears. Should then the Director find that his penitent

is one who falls into deadly sin, he must order him to direct the various penances and fasts which he undertakes in honour of Mary, to the uprooting of his evil habit. If he recite the Rosary, the Office, or other such prayers, he must be commanded, while reciting the words with his lips, in his heart to implore deliverance from his vices. The penitent will thus obtain amendment of life; for, as St. Bernard says, the Virgin does not despise these polluted souls, but rather glories in raising them from the filth of their sins, provided they persevere in importuning her with constant prayer. "Thou, O tenderest Mother, shrinkest not from any sinner, however loathsome; if only he sigh at thy feet, and implore thy prayers, thou cherishest and protectest him until thou hast reconciled him with the Divine Judge."*

486. But if the penitent be free from all deadly sin, and be walking in the path of perfection, the Director must take notice of what virtues are wanting to him, what passions and defects most hinder his spiritual progress; and then require him, in all his prayers to the Blessed Virgin, to beg for the extirpation of the latter, and the acquisition of the former; and to direct to this end the homage which he daily renders to her. This is the teaching of the mellifluous Doctor whom we lately quoted. He says that by recommending ourselves to Mary, by having her name ever on our tongues, ever in our hearts, we shall not miss the path to perfection, but reach joyfully the end proposed.†

487. Second suggestion. But that this devotion may serve as a stay to the frailty of such as are still liable to grievous falls, that it may enable those who are free from mortal sin to avoid deliberate venial faults, it is not sufficient to recommend one's self to the Blessed Virgin in time of prayer only, but further, we must have a prompt recourse to her whenever the danger of sin arises. For if the penitent be assailed by the temptations of devils, at the

* Tu peccatorem quantumlibet foedum non horres, non despicis, si ad te suspiraverit, tuumque interventum pœnitenti corde flagitaverit. Tu illum a desperationis barathro, piâ mater, retrahis, foves, non despicis, quousque horrendo judici miserum reconcilies. In Deprecatione ad Virginem.

† Mariam cogita, Mariam invoca: non recedat ab ore, non recedat a corde. Ipsam sequens non devias, ipsam cogitans non erras: ipsâ duce non fatigaris, ipsâ propitiâ pervenis. Hom. 2, Super *Missus*.

invocation of Mary, as Bonaventure tells us,* they will tremble and be put to flight. "If," says St. Bernard, "thou art beset by thine own passions, there is no more powerful remedy against their violence than to have recourse to Mary; if thou art threatened with drowning by the billows of pride, ambition or detraction, make haste and call upon Mary. If the bark of thy soul be beaten with the waves of anger, of covetousness, of fleshly lusts, call upon Mary. If shocked at the enormity of thy crimes, thou feel thyself sinking into the abyss of melancholy, cast thyself at once upon the bosom of Mary."† The Director should constantly inculcate this teaching upon his penitents, and take care that at the first outburst of passion, at the first onslaught of temptation, they lift up their hearts to Mary, and cry to her for aid: thus they cannot fail to be secured against every fall, whether mortal or venial; for, as St. John Damascene writes, "Mary is a city of refuge which gives safety to all who flee to it."‡

488. Third suggestion. If the Director would wish these acts of recourse to the Blessed Virgin to be effectual for removing defects and implanting virtues, let him take care that they be made in that fulness of trust which a child has for the mother in whose tenderness he has confidence; for besides the encouragement which such hope gives to fight manfully and to act strenuously, such prayers will be of greater avail to obtain assistance from the Blessed Virgin; as nothing is so capable as lively faith of prevailing with the Heart of God and that of His Blessed Mother. The Confessor will therefore strive to impress his penitents with a strong conviction, that, in Mary's bosom, as St. Bernard assures us, all may find refuge, remedy, healing, comfort; grace, forgiveness, and life everlasting.§

* Ab invocatione nominis tui trepidat spiritus malignus. In Psalterio.

† Si jactaris superbiæ undis, si ambitionis, si detractionis, si simulationis, Mariam invoca. Si iracundia, aut avaritia, aut carnis illecebra naviculum conacusserit mentis, respice Mariam. Si criminum immanitate turbatus, barathro coeperis absorberi tristitiæ, cogita Mariam. Super *Missus*, Hom. 2.

‡ Mariam evasisse civitatem refugii omnibus confugientibus ad eam. Orat. de Dormit.

§ Captivus redemptionem, æger curationem, tristis consolationem, justus gratiam, et peccator veniam. De Virg. Mariâ, Super verba Apocal.

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489. Fourth suggestion. Above all things, the Director must be careful to caution his penitents never to omit the pious practices which, by his advice, they have adopted in honour of the Blessed Virgin. There are some who, on falling into sin, lose heart, and omit their customary prayers, thinking that these are no longer acceptable to our Blessed Lady. The Director must undeceive these persons, for if they offer up prayers for their own conversion, such prayers will be most pleasing to Mary, who, as we have already seen, with her own lips told St. Bridget, "I am the Mother of all sinners who wish to amend."*

Let the sinner remember too, what befell Thomas à Kempis, who saw the Virgin distribute to his companions a nectar of Paradise, while on coming to him, she looked at him coldly, and passed on without bestowing upon him the like favour: the reason was that he had omitted some of his accustomed prayers in her honour. Nothing is so pleasing to the Blessed Virgin as fidelity and constancy in the honour which we render to her.

* Ego sum mater omnium peccatorum se emendare volentium.

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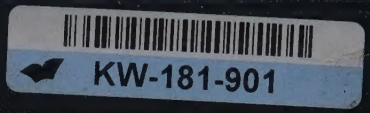
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